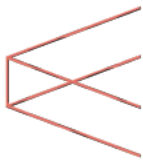


BAD HAIR
by
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CULTURE MACHINE

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time. I've loved the horror genre since I was a kid, thanks to my aunt Zora, who introduced me to *A Nightmare on Elm Street* at an age that might seem reckless if in fact I had any sense of what was happening. At five I didn't exactly have a handle on what was at stake for the characters. I was in it for the cool glove.

As I've matured (hopefully) as both a story teller and story lover, the horror films that stick with me most are the ones that have something on their minds. Fear is perhaps the most primordial emotion we possess. It's what insured the "survival of the fittest," i.e. our ancient ancestors who stayed safe long enough to pass along their fear prone DNA to us. This might be why fear, when harnessed to serve a story with something to say about the human condition, can leave one breathlessly awake. I'm talking now about films like *Rosemary's Baby*, the original *Stepford Wives*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* ('56 & '78), *The Shining*, *Alien*, and *Get Out* to name a few.

Not only do these films thrill us, with their perhaps far-fetched central concepts wrapped in deft storytelling, they also leave us with something long after the credits roll. That gnawing feeling that we must apply the lessons unlearned by the not so lucky protagonists in these stories, lest we meet their proverbial fates.

This is why horror and satire go so well together. This is why the best horror films make us laugh one minute, then shriek the next, only to wake up in a cold sweat some nights later; Our subconscious, through nightmares, taunting us with their hidden meanings. This is why I wrote *Bad Hair*. Like my first film, a satire called *Dear White People* which I've since spun off into a tv series for Netflix, I'm making this because I have much to say about the hidden costs and quiet personal deaths one feels when trying to thrive in a world not built with them in mind. Borrowing from the "hair horror" sub-genre popular in Asia, this story centers around a dark skinned girl from Compton named Anna, who has everything she needs to succeed in the burgeoning music television field of Los Angeles, 1989. Everything that is except the right "look." A look decided centuries before she was born by forces beyond her control and understanding.

I invite you to explore the choices she makes, their alternatives (if any) and of course their repercussions. All against the backdrop of the New Jack Swing era when black culture became pop. Hopefully you enjoy the ride. I mentioned I had a lot to say with this piece. So, for now I'll allow it to speak for itself.

Sincerely yours,

Justin Simien

"What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments,
but what is woven into the lives of others."

- Pericles

INT. A CHILD'S ROOM - NIGHT (EARLY 1970'S)

A BLACK WOMAN glares at you from a box of Lye Relaxer.
Impossibly straight hair. "Get the luxe look" it exclaims.

Beneath is a radio. Melancholic soul music.
Tape rolls in a recorder next to it. You hear but don't see:

ANNA (O.S.)
You're tuned to Bludso on the
radio. Stage one of my dramatic
transformation is almost complete.

You scan the room. Twin beds.
Strewn polyester clothes. Dolls. Records. Jet magazines.

LINDA (O.S.)
Oh my God you are such a child.

LINDA BLUDSO, 14. Tall. Café au lait skin. Flowing hair.

She rolls her eyes at little cousin ANNA BLUDSO, 7.
Dark cocoa skin. White lye relaxer cakes her coarse hair.

ANNA
Well. I'm an actual child, so...
(her hair)
-- Ahhh.

Anna WINCES. Her hand flies up to her coated hair.

LINDA
It just means it's working.

The creak of a heavy door. We HEAR THE MATERNAL VOICE OF:

AUNTIE BLUDSO (O.S.)
Girls! We're home!

Anna can't take it. Her head's on fire.

ANNA
(rapid-fire)
Listeners, we'll be right back
after a quick break!

Anna cranks up the music on the radio and...

LINDA
Fine. But don't get mad when you
just as nappy as you ever were!

...bursts past Linda into a dark hallway.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anna hops in the tub. Cranks the faucet.
Blood-red rust water belches out then goes clear.
Anna sticks her head under as Linda follows behind.

Linda squeezes neutralizer into Anna's hair and rinses.
A surprised smile on Linda's lips.
Anna's hair is bone straight.

ANNA
Linda...

LINDA
Hold on. You might could pass for
my sister after all.

ANNA
Should it... still burn?

AUNTIE BLUDSO (O.S.)
Girls?

LINDA
Don't come up! We got a surprise!

Linda's fingers snag at something. Her smile gone.
A lump of hair pulls clean from Anna's head.

ANNA
Linda? It really hurts.

More hair falls from Anna's head. Cakes the drain.
Linda freezes in dread.

LINDA
(panic)
I did what the box told me...

Anna grabs a hand mirror and goes to the medicine cabinet.
Rotates to see the reflection of the back of her head.

SMASH. The hand mirror hits the floor.

The back of Anna's head is the color of rancid meat.

AUNTIE BLUDSO (O.S.)
Girls!?

Anna wails in shock. Her hands fly to her ever balding head.
Feels at the chemical burn bubbling down her nape.

The pain. The shock. Anna is in hysterics.

UNCLE BLUDSO (O.S.)
What's going on up there?

LINDA
I didn't mean to!

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anna's screams. Linda's denials.
The scuffle of worried adults.
You hear them all from the hallway.
Static grates its way through the radio.
Recorder's just about out of tape.

CUT TO BLACK

CUE: "Ramifications for String Orchestra" by György Ligeti
Sparse. Ominous. Unnerving.

FADE IN:

TITLES MONTAGE

-- Strands of hair drop into a sun-kissed straw basket.
-- LABORERS wash the hair in steel wash tubs.
-- Bundles of the hair are stuffed into wooden crates and loaded onto a riverboat, docked in an old bayou.
-- Ominous waves lap at the riverboat carrying the crates down the Mississippi River. Trees where men were surely hung sway covered in a thick black moss.
-- The boxes of hair are stuffed into a shipping truck at a port. The name MANNING CO. with an ink rendering of a moss tree logo gleams along the truck's side.
-- You follow the truck down highways that cut through America. Through hills... valleys... farmland... cities...

EXT. HOLLYWOOD - DAY

Billboards framed through smog.
Chic white people sell you clothes and cigarettes.
Below, tourists emulate the look of the gods above.
The Manning shipping truck dodges them and rounds a corner.

FINAL TITLE:

BAD HAIR

END OF MONTAGE.

As the truck drives out of view, you focus on the top floor of a modest tower. On one bathroom window in particular.

CHYRON: LOS ANGELES, 1989

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

You descend past white tile...
Upon the back of a chocolate brown woman's head.
She fights her coarse hair into something of a shape.
Activator helps give it enough curl to be balled into a bun.
Laborious and the best she has time to do.

She adjusts the bun to cover a scar on the back of her nape.
It's ANNA BLUDSO at 25. An impossibly bright spark about her.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Anna enters a swanky master suite. Stares with longing at:

JULIUS SAMUELS, 28. Chiseled. Flat-top fade. Hazel eyes.
Buried in white sheets. Frowns at Anna's presence.

JULIUS
You're still here.

Julius pulls out a brush and brushes his perfect fade.

ANNA
The bus stops running at one. And
we went pretty late.

Anna spies a leather whip on the ground. Grins and slides it underneath a dresser. Hell of a night. Julius walks over.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Hey I know we got that ten o'
clock, but could you cover for me?
Say I'm out running an errand or --

He enters the bathroom. Anna's eyes dim as Julius locks it.

INT. WAITING AREA - MORNING

A clock lands on 9:35 AM.

Anna shrugs off her anxiety. Looks over her resume again.
"CULTURE: 1985-Present"

The room is filled with LIGHT-SKINNED BLACK GIRLS.
Anna eyes the one other DARK SKINNED WOMAN, who fights her insecurity by pulling at a cheap blazer.

Wait, there's another dark skinned WOMAN WITH A WEAVE.
Straight jet black hair. Glares at Anna like she's prey.

VOICE (O.S.)
Anna Bludso?

INT. AUDITION ROOM - DAY

Anna sits across from two WHITE MALE EXECS.
Their eyes are on her hair.

EXEC
The call was for a Downtown Julie
Brown type...

Anna's "on" like a lightbulb.

ANNA
Someone worldly, articulate,
knowledgeable. Charismatic.
(a beat)
Black.

Polite laughter.

EXEC
Assistant at Culture for... four
years? They never gave you a shot?

ANNA
Only so many spots in Culture.

EXEC
Your production experience is great
but we lean more rock than urban.

ANNA
Perfect. Cause I think I speak to a
global audience. You know?

EXEC
Thank you so much.

Anna breaks a sweat. Or is it activator? Stares at the execs.
The blinking red light of the camera beckons her...

ANNA
Alright, it's Anna Bludso coming at
you with the hottest of the hot.
(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)
Yeah we got the new Milli Vanilla.
Yes we got that new Madonna, but
are ya'll ready for this new
Warrant? This new Guns N' Roses?
Like a Prayer, we are taking you
there, Stay tuned.

The girls got appeal. Unmistakeable. She awaits an applause.
One of the execs COUGHS instead.

INT. WAITING AREA - DAY

Anna re-enters. Dejected.
On her way out you catch the HV1 (Hit Videos 1) logo.
The long haired woman follows Anna with vacant hazel eyes.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY

Skyscrapers tower over a hot Hollywood morning.
A WHITE SUPER MODEL stares at you from a billboard.
The Face Wash ad implores, "Be the fairest of them all!"

Below, Anna cuts through the thick of tourists.
Sucks down a cigarette.

INT. MVT LOBBY - DAY

A gleaming, bustling, hip lobby.
MVT: Music Video Television in steel letters at check-in.

A wall of TV's where WHITE PEOPLE sell you things. Beer.
Friendship. Detergent. Family. Processed foods. Fulfillment.

Anna walks. Stray WHITE EYES clock and judge her. Who is she?
Should she be here? You spot them everywhere. BAM!

She runs into GRANT MADISON, silver fox in Armani surrounded
by assistants. Furious, he glares at her...

GRANT
(to assistant)
She work here?

...And disappears into the elevators.

Mortified Anna continues. Something catches her eye.

Inside a glass conference room, WHITE MALE EXECS applaud a
BLONDE FEMALE EXEC in power red. She flips her long flowing
hair and soaks it in. A successful pitch?

Anna stares. She wants to be this woman. Suddenly the commercials on the TVs give way to MVT programming.

Rows of a single WHITE VJ'S face...
Wait... There's one black one. Julius beams from a small TV.

JULIUS (ON TV)
Tonight on Culture TV, "The Block"
with your man Julius. And boy are
you in for a treat. We got a world
exclusive premiere, from none other
than Sandra. Stay tuned!

Anna stares at Julius. Envy? Lust?

RECEPTIONIST
Excuse me, who are you here to see?

ANNA
I work here.
(off the receptionist's
confusion)
Culture.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh... right. Thirteenth Fl--

ANNA
-- I know... where I work.

Anna rushes over to the elevators.
Large framed photos of MVT Execs beside them.

The biggest is for Grant Madison, MVT's CEO.
You focus on a smaller portrait. EDNA NIGHT.
Regal dreadlocked black woman in her 50's. EVP of Culture TV.

Anna enters the elevator.

INT. ANNEX / CULTURE TV - EVENING

Gone are the gleaming floors, vibrant colors and chic design.
The Annex is all beige stucco and crumbling cubicle walls.
Oddly desolate.

A wall-mounted TV plays a promo for Culture TV to no one.
Terrible R&B Musak and stock footage of black people dancing.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Culture! We're on for you!

A bevy of on-air personalities and their show titles flash.

SISTAH SOUL. Earthy Diva with dreads hosts SMOOTH MELODIES.
 AFRIQUÉ. Dubious African accent. Hosts HERITAGE HOUR.
 BROOK-LYNNE. Red Hair. Salt & Peppa vibe. HAIR BEAT.
 And of course Julius. The star. Host of THE BLOCK.

Anna exits the elevator and swipes past the TV.
 A cheap clock indicates it's 10:15 AM.
 The only light comes from a conference room down the hall.

ANNA

Damn it.

As she scurries, you hear a familiar voice...

GRANT (O.S.)

...everyone's so proud of what
 Culture has done. Giving the
 African American community a place
 on cable to be celebrated.

Anna peeps first, then slips through a cracked door...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM A - DAY

... emerging into a crowded room. At the center and at the
 head of a table is Grant! Beside him is EDNA NIGHT.
 She shoots disappointment at Anna from her eyes.

GRANT

But the numbers just aren't there.
 The nature of MVT's business
 demands that we appeal to as wide a
 demographic as possible, even if
 that means changing the brand we've
 established.

(rehearsed sigh)

As such, after some strategic
 discussions and a lot of soul
 searching, Edna has decided to step
 down as EVP of Programming.

GROANS from the crowd erupt. Except Julius. Brush. Brush.

You focus on a WOMAN whose back is to you.
 A 30 inch weave of straight black hair flows from her head.

EDNA

(scripted)

It's amicable. Been thinking about
 a move for some time.

GRANT

That's right. Now it is with complete confidence, that I introduce you to your new EVP. The legendary, Zora.

Anna glimpses the flawless face of the woman with the hair. It's the woman on the relaxer box from Annna's childhood. A Greek Goddess in ebony. Her accent vaguely British. ZORA. Timeless.

Julius smiles. Lust in his eyes.
Brook Lynne, Sista Soul and Afriqué aren't pleased.

ZORA

(rehearsed)

Thank you Grant. Now I know what you're thinking. They say I'm the world's first black supermodel...

Brook Lynne's eyes roll to the back of her skull.

ZORA (CONT'D)

... right? What do I know about running a channel? Well, I've quietly been inching towards this goal for quite some time. I've produced much of MVT's fashion coverage, as well as a cable late night show. I'm the executive producer behind two hit syndicated series...

Sista Soul leans over to Anna:

SISTA SOUL

Court shows...

ZORA

... And rest assured I'll be consulting with the brilliant Edna Night as often as she'll let me.

EDNA

(never call)

Of course!

ZORA

Now look, programs will be down a few months for re-tooling.

(groans)

I know, it's sudden, but we simply must.

(MORE)

ZORA (CONT'D)

If Cult, that's what we're going to call it by the way, is going to be the authority on pop culture in the nineties, well we simply must be sure of its direction. Give it a proper relaunch. Videos and occasional news breaks will still run. The rest? We'll be figuring that out in the days to come.

My assistant Rosalyn will be setting meetings all week. Just to get to know you all and decide what skills you might bring to Cult when it relaunches.

ROSALYN, 20's. Buttoned up. Straight hair. Politely smiles.

AFRIQUÉ

(sotto to Anna)

Might?

The room erupts in more chatter. Julius just sips his coffee.

GRANT

Oh! There's one bright spot. The Block continues to do quite well in the ratings. And especially with our very exciting, and contractually obligated, Sandra premiere, that program will continue as planned.

Anna stares at Zora.

As if she feels it, Zora turns coolly to Anna. Eyes first.

INT. CULTURE ELEVATORS - EVENING

Anna, Sista Soul, Afriqué and Brook hug Edna.

SISTA SOUL

There's nothing we can do? Edna this is your channel!

Edna holds her tears and rallies for her troops.

EDNA

Grant's been edging me out since the merger, ya'll. It's my time.

AFRIQUÉ

What about us? After all we have built?

BROOK LYNNE

I just got a condo, I can't go back
to radio.

ANNA

Edna... my promotion.

EDNA

I fought for you. Each of you.
You're the best in the business.
I'm sure Zora will see that.

No one's convinced.

Anna spies movers lug expensive leather couches and chairs
into a corner office. Edna's name is ripped off the door.

EDNA (CONT'D)

Look... just between us. Starting
another little production company.
Programming for us, by us. It's
going to take a few months now, but
you all are the first I'm going to
call. And ya'll better answer.
Maybe we find a way to stop working
for them.

ANNA

I'll be waiting by the phone.

AFRIQUÉ

We'd follow you anywhere queen.

Edna smiles bittersweet and steps into the elevator.
BAM as Zora's name-plate is nailed to the office door.

INT. THE BLOCK SET - CONTINUOUS

A room dressed as a set with a prop TV.
Filled with the controlled chaos of a crew. Mostly black.
Lots of hot-combed styles, braids and jheri curls.

Zora and Rosalyn whisper and eye the scene. Anna's clearly
Culture's secret weapon, calmly straightening up the madness.

PRODUCER

Do we have copy? We go on in five!

ANNA

Writers went union. I wrote out the
cards yesterday.

PRODUCER
Thank you Anna!

A P.A. rushes a beverage through the thicket of people.

ANNA
Excuse me? Is that tea iced?

P.A.
Julius wanted --

ANNA
-- Don't give a VJ an iced drink
five minutes before air. There's a
kettle and a box of Lipton in
there. Light steep. Hurry!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A closet converted to a control room. Anna stands behind a
few Live Editors. She calls a P.A. over.

ANNA
You see that? C-Stand. Right upper
corner.

The P.A. scurries off as the Director takes his chair.

PRODUCER
Anna has Julius proofed his cards?

Anna makes a "boy... please" face.

PRODUCER (CONT'D)
Sorry, can you? Gonna look for him.

ANNA
On it.

You watch the monitor as Edna exits and Anna takes the stage.
So does Rosalyn.

As camera operators zoom in and out to find focus, Anna reads
the cards. No. She embodies them.

ANNA (CONT'D)
It's your man Julius and welcome to
The Block, where we got a bangin'
exclusive from the Princess of Pop-
Soul. It's already in the Billboard
Top Ten and has it's sights on
number. One Night by --

JULIUS
-- got it! Sorry I'm late.

Julius steps into Anna's spot and she scurries back to the monitors while he squints and reads the cards.

AD
On in 5, 4, 3, 2...

Julius turns on his smile as they go to air.

JULIUS
It's your man Julius and welcome to
The Block where we got a bangin'
exclusive...

Brook Lynne, Sista and few others crowd the monitors.

BROOK LYNNE
All I know is Sandra better not
give us no more bubble gum shit.

SISTA SOUL
You know she stays aiming for the
white charts.

ANNA
Shhh...

The monitors fade to black. Anna holds her breath.

INT. MANSION - NIGHT (SANDRA'S VIDEO)

Clean-lined furniture. Geometric fireplace with built-in speakers. A contemporary mansion lit in Gothic blues.

A hand smashes through a window. Reaches in. Opens the door.

You see her boots first. Then the ripped jeans. Then SANDRA herself. 25. Caramel Skin. Hazel eyes.

Her face framed by silky, bone straight, jet-black hair.
A New Jack Swing beat starts.

INT. THE BLOCK SET - CONTINUOUS

P.A.
Is that a new nose?

AFRIQUÉ
Contouring... And contacts? Maybe?

Anna gets in close to see. The broadcast lines flicker as Anna strains to see Sandra's almost glowing eyes.

INT. MANSION - DAY (SANDRA'S VIDEO)

Sandra's a pop princess possessed. No, an urban pop princess. The beat is hard. Edgy. She's broken into this house.

SANDRA

*It's dangerous, to feel the way I
feel after only one night!*

Sandra thrashes her hair. Left, right, up and around.

INT. THE BLOCK SET - CONTINUOUS

Audible gasps.

P.A.

She must have that thing glued on.

SISTA SOUL

Or a really good relaxer maybe?

Brook Lynne runs fingers through her red pressed hair.

BROOK LYNNE

Naw, my shit don't move like that
and I'm part Cherokee.

Some eye rolls. Anna turns to see Zora who excuses Deb.

AFRIQUÉ

It is a sew-in.

ANNA

A what now?

AFRIQUÉ

Invented in mother Egypt...

(more eye rolls)

...It is a technique where they
take human hair and sew it into
your natural hair. Very expensive.

BROOK LYNE

Oh, weave? My girl Tanitra started
doing them. Expensive as hell.

ANNA

Sounds painful.

SISTA SOUL

Supposed to be better for you than
the creamy crack right?
(puffs her natural hair)
You know what's better than either?

BROOK LYNNE

Okay, Sojourner Truth, ain't nobody
got time for all that upkeep.

SISTA SOUL

I have upkeep? Girl your head looks
like the fourth of July.

AFRIQUÉ

Sisters. Please. Unity.

All the eye rolls.

INT. MANSION - DAY (SANDRA'S VIDEO)

Sandra sings and dances in this man's house - in his bedroom -
bathtub - closet. She wears his clothes. Obsessed with him.

SANDRA

*After one night! I'm in love can't
you see? One night! What's
happenin' to me?*

She slides out in his shirt and undies ala "Risky Business"
and has a dance orgasm just before theres a KEY RATTLE.

The man has returned. He looks up to see... no one. She's
gone. Just a lipstick kiss on one of his framed self
portraits. Cut to commercial.

INT. THE BLOCK SET - CONTINUOUS

Impressed, the crowd starts to mumble and disperse.

AFRIQUÉ

I think I need a cigarette.

BROOK LYNNE

I think I need a weave.

SEVERAL FEMALE P.A.'S

Same.

Anna is more than impressed. She was fed by that.

SISTA SOUL

The song is hot but why anybody
would want to sew somebody else's
dead energy into their heads is
beyond me.

BROOK LYNNE

Shit, when brothas see this,
Tanitra gon' make a killin'.

Anna walks over to set and collects the cue cards.
Eyes meet Julius'.

ANNA

Crazy day.

He eyes her carefully.

ANNA (CONT'D)

What you getting into tonight?

Julius eyes the room. No one's in ear shot.

JULIUS

Hey... um I been seeing someone.

Anna keeps shuffling the cards.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

Heard me?

ANNA

Like... a therapist or?

JULIUS

Anna... You know you're the homie
and... the more I think about it I
worry...no I know, I crossed a
line. I turned this into something
it never should've been.

ANNA

We been crossing the line for
years.

JULIUS

I take full responsibility.

ANNA

We crossed the line in your
dressing room this afternoon.

JULIUS

Well you pushed for that.

Anna feels tears coming. But she can't let him have that.

JULIUS (CONT'D)
 Eh, I'm sorry. This has been
 killing me, alright.

Anna catches Julius' eyes. They're locked with... Zora's.
 Frozen like a deer in headlights, Anna shifts back to Julius.

ANNA
 Has it?

Julius shrugs off and walks away. Brush brush brush.
 Anna swallows this as her eyes meet Zora whose glare could
 bore a hole through solid concrete.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

Anna steps off a bus.
 Strolls down a seedy dark Hollywood street.
 Her face lit by a fresh cigarette. She dodges the homeless.

ANNA
 Shit!

Anna's heart drops.
 A HOMELESS WOMAN. Her ratted hair (wig? weave?) caked in
 blood, as her eyes meet Anna's. Before the woman is the
 carcass of a cat. Run-over? Murdered by this woman?

The HONK of a shipping truck breaks the spell. Manning Co.
 Anna holds her breath and marches on.
 The eyes of the woman on Anna the entire time.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A tiny studio barely big enough for a queen bed and a TV.
 Red Neon flashes incessantly through a window.

There's a wall covered with... Sandra. Magazine cut-outs from
 videos and photoshoots throughout the 80's. Pressed hair.
 Often smiling. A black pop star white parents are okay with.
 Also, Anna's obsession.

Anna curls up in bed with EDGAR, a black cat.
 Holds him extra tight. Her hair's wrapped.
 There's a movie on the TV:

Sandra, pre-weave, playing a NEWS ANCHOR in a glossy 80's rom-
 com set in an all black New York. She kisses her on screen
 love interest, a man who looks a lot like Julius.

Anna flicks to Culture TV. Julius is on. Anna mutes it. Stares. The dimples. The hair. The lips. Fuck he's fine. Anna reaches into her panties.

BANG BANG BANG! Edgar goes flying.

LANDLORD (O.S.)
I know you're in there!

Anna slows her breath. He slurs, utterly inebriated.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)
You're TEN DAYS late! Don't think I
won't kick your ass outta here!

Anna's eyes fix upon the shadow of feet under the door. After some more banging, he huffs off.

Her hands reach back down. Julius smiles through scan lines.

FADE OUT.

INT. CULTURE OFFICES - DAY

Anna watches as a BLACK EXECUTIVE exits Zora's office in tears. Brook, Sista and Afriqué crowd around Anna's desk.

AFRIQUÉ
I thought she was just getting to
know us.

FEMALE VOICE
Excuse me?

They all startle. Turn to see Rosalyn..

ROSALYN
Hey girls. Anna?

Anna turns. Deer in headlight eyes.

ROSALYN (CONT'D)
Zora will see you now.

The other girls scurry off as Anna rises to follow Rosalyn.

ROSALYN (CONT'D)
Girl to girl... This isn't a chat.
It's an interview. Understand?

ANNA
Getting the picture...

ROSALYN

I see how you get down on set.
Girls like you are one in a
million. Make sure she knows that.

Rosalyn throws a genuine smile at Anna.

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - DARK

The door to the dimly lit office opens. Anna enters.
Original Basquiats on the wall. Furniture out of Dynasty.

Zora sits in a warm pool of lamp light behind a desk.
Anna sits before her as Rosalyn closes the door.

ZORA

You were Edna's assistant, no?
(off Anna's look)
I mean I'm sure you were much more
than that, you've been here
forever. But that was your title?

Anna takes in Zora. Her face beat for the gods, her slim body
adorned in expensive off the runway fair.

ANNA

Yes.

ZORA

She was very concerned about her
dear Anna. Why hadn't you moved up?

ANNA

Well, after I came up with *The
Block*--

ZORA

(chile please)
-- You came up with *The Block*?

ANNA

There wasn't a showcase for Pop-
Soul or Hard R&B on the channel and
it's clearly an emerging genre.

ZORA

Where'd you find Julius? He's
great.

ANNA

Julius was at reception when I
started.

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)
I wanted to host, actually. And
produce. But Mr. Madison felt
otherwise.

ZORA
Grant has an eye for talent. And
the viewership does skew female.
Eye candy, you know?

ANNA
Sure.

Anna stares at the ground. Doesn't want to talk about Julius.

ZORA
And what do you think of the
network? As a whole?

ANNA
Empowering.

ZORA
Once more with feeling.

ANNA
Well... I have ideas.

Anna pauses. Zora lets the silence sit.

ZORA
(dead serious)
Now or never darling.

ANNA
The Block is a good start, but this
new Teddy Riley sound? It's not a
niche, it's the future. It's moving
our culture into the mainstream. We
got Bobby Brown, Sandra, Janet.
They're already way beyond the
"black charts" and we're the only
ones in town who will air them. We
could own this.

ZORA
Consumer research disguised as
entertainment.

Anna eyes Zora's hair, braided and resting on her shoulder.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Sounds pricey.

ANNA

It'll look that way too. But it won't be. MVT has plenty of empty stages. We just need a phone line.

A long silence. Zora is... impressed? Threatened?

Anna's eyes drift back to Zora's hair.
Inexplicably now on the opposite shoulder.

ZORA

Do a little write up for me?
Treatment, sample script, guest ideas? Potential budget...

Anna pulls a document from a folder. It's a tome:
"Live Culture Show Proposal by Anna Bludso."
Zora grabs it suspiciously.

ZORA (CONT'D)

How'd you know I'd ask for this?

ANNA

I made it for Edna, but she never had the time.

Zora flips through it.

ZORA

I'll let you know.

Anna takes this as her cue to leave.
Before she's out the door...

ZORA (CONT'D)

Who does your hair darling?

ANNA

No one. Me?

Zora just glares at her. You're certain her hair has changed shoulders yet again while you weren't looking.

ZORA

-- Aren't you tired of it? The stares you get walking through that MVT lobby? All of them wondering what you do? Why you're here? If you walked into any other floor in this tower for a job interview? They wouldn't even let you past reception. You know that right? I mean sistas are fired for less everyday.

This hits Anna where she lives.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Music people... well they have certain expectations. And my girls need to move freely. I wonder. Do you want to be one of my girls --

ANNA

-- Yes.

It came out so fast it shocks even Anna.

ZORA

Hmm.

Anna makes a sheepish exit.

INT. CULTURE OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Back at Anna's desk, there's a business card:

"Virgie's Hair Salon" with a note:
Tell them I sent you. Good luck. - Rosalyn

Anna sees Brook down the hall. Makes a tiny thumbs up.
Brook wipes her brow in mime relief.

EXT. SOUTH CENTRAL - NIGHT

A forgotten black neighborhood. Working class folks. Classic cars blasting Hip-Hop. Swole men in wife-beaters sipping forties and the women that love them.

Black models sell you malt liquor from billboards.
A Native America stereotype sells you cigarettes.

Zora also stares at you from a billboard. Conditioner ad.
"Hair that moves!" it promises.

Anna slumps out of a bus. Her hair covered in a head wrap.
A lit cigarette already in her lips.

Anna passes a row of Salons. Stops before one. "CROWNED."
Black women laugh and gossip under hot combs and rollers.
A world Anna does not know. She stares with longing.

A sign catches Anna's attention: "NO WEAVES. DON'T ASK."

INT. BLUDSO HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Cozy and wood paneled. Masters and Doctorate degrees cover the walls, as do photos of Anna and Linda as children. A picture of Anna at five on her FATHER's lap in a radio studio.
He was a DJ.

MALE VOICE

Look what arrived yesterday.

Anna slinks in and heads toward the voices.

ANNA

Sorry I'm late guys!

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

An animated family conversation. Around the table:
AMOS BLUDSO, 57, gray haired and dapper.
MAXINE BLUDSO, 55, graceful.
LINDA BLUDSO, 30, all grown up. Sophisticated and academic.
KIEREN JOHNSON, 30's, Linda's fiancé.

Caramel people with good hair. Except for Anna.

AMOS

Took me years to track it down.

There's a wall of books behind Amos.
Anna glances at them disdainfully.
12 Years A Slave, Our Nig, The Octoroon...
Intermingled are various Minstrel style figurines.

A tar black Pickaninny Girl stares at Anna with bug eyes.

AMOS (CONT'D)

Mama used to know all these by
heart. Almost wondered if there was
even an actual book.

He holds a frayed beige hardcover in his hand.
Da Ways Ah White Folk: And other slave stories.

ANNA

(kisses Amos)

Uncle.

(kiss)

Linda.

As Anna reaches her Aunt Maxine for a kiss.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Something new for his "Wall of
Oppression?"

MAXINE
Chile...

KIEREN
Does it have the... what was it?
"Skinny, skinny" story?

AMOS
"Skinny skinny don't you know me?"

Kieren, Linda and Amos share a laugh of recognition.
Anna and Maxine just stare at each other, confused.

LINDA
(helping them out)
It's a folk tale slaves used to
tell about witches who leave their
own skin at night to go haunting.

MAXINE
Oh.

AMOS
(flipping through)
"The Moss Tree." That was the one
Mama used to tell...

Maxine brings out a casserole dish of cheesy lasagna.
Kieren reaches for the book.

KIEREN
May I?

AMOS
Of course.

MAXINE
How's work Anna?

ANNA
Intense.

LINDA
I can relate to that.

KEIREN
(re: Linda)
I hardly see this one anymore.

Anna's eyes dim as the conversation passes her by.
Pokes at her lasagna. Red grease spews out.

LINDA

Well they have me teaching History
now in addition to English lit. And
I started an after school college
prep program. Me and a few parents.

AMOS

Remarkable.

LINDA

Well, what good is any of it if
these kids don't get into college?
(eyes Anna)
Sorry. I cut you off Anna. You were
talking about work?

AMOS

Still interning for that lady?

ANNA

Executive Assistant. And no,
actually. She left the company.

MAXINE

Oh... Your job's not in jeopardy?

ANNA

No not at all. They're doing some
re-tooling so... Actually they're
looking at giving me my own show.

KIEREN

(nose in the book)
What does that mean? "A show?"

ANNA

So you know how when you turn on
the TV, people appear to be inside
talking? They didn't cover this
when you were getting your
doctorate, Kieren?

AMOS

You let all your smarts run out
your mouth you'll never have 'em in
your head where you need 'em.

MAXINE

Amos... Go on honey.

ANNA

Well I produce shows around our music videos, but you know I've always wanted my own.

LINDA

Since we were kids! When does it air Anna?

ANNA

Well...there's still a lot to do so it might be a while, but it's all moving along.

Maxine, Amos nor Linda can decide if they believe her.

LINDA

Really hope it works out.

ANNA

It already is, so --

KIEREN

(still in the book)
-- Oh... The flying African stories, I did my thesis on these!

AMOS

Yes!

LINDA

No! That's in there!?

Anna rolls eyes. The conversation switched from her again.

ANNA

Ridiculous...

AMOS

I'm sorry?

ANNA

Just surprised to see a table of people with doctorates tripping over superstitions and fairy tales.

The family trades looks. Amos closes the book. Straightens.

AMOS

Fairy tales? How does one group of people subjugate another?

MAXINE

Amos...

AMOS

No, I'm just educating the girl.
You subjugate a people by telling
them their science is superstition.
Their faith is heresy. And their
wisdom is make believe.

ANNA

Should I be taking notes?

AMOS

My brother raised you in the
church. Remember Adam and Eve?

ANNA

Been awhile but I get the gist...

AMOS

The Garden of Eden. One of the
first stories we're taught and the
last one we believe. Well guess
what, it was real. And it wasn't
just a place. There was a time when
it was the whole world.
Archeologists are finding that Homo
Sapien man roamed for millions of
years as hunter gatherers. Out of
Africa we toured this world, our
skin rich with melanin and our
stomachs full from the abundant
fruit of the earth. Nothing to
fight over. There was plenty. The
stars guided us. Nature became our
healer and teacher. We communed
with her and she revealed to us her
magic. And then? Some tribes decide
to stop roaming. Plant wheat. Corn.

Anna fights eye contact with Amos. Shifts to the Pickanniny
figure. That black horror-show face grin.

AMOS (CONT'D)

They built homes to shield
themselves from the sun, growing
pale and plump. They invented
property. Ownership. Then theft.
Then rule of law. Then the state.
The king. War. Power. Currency.

All eyes on Anna, as Amos reduces her under his intellect.

AMOS (CONT'D)

Nature was no longer our teacher,
she was our slave.

(MORE)

AMOS (CONT'D)

And we made up all sorts of rules to keep her in check. The whole of Western civilization consolidates around something called race. A way to separate, at last, man from nature. Pure from impure. White from everything else.

Fair skinned tribes forgo their own heritage and unite as white in order to rule the land. Their rules, so counter to nature that we spend our lives learning the ways of their world just in order to survive it.

LINDA

She gets it dad --

AMOS

(raising his voice)

-- From the moment we are born we are indoctrinated by the white way of seeing. We are taught that European science is the only lens upon which the natural world may be understood despite the fact it can not explain even the most basic mysteries. Life. Consciousness. But you know who could? The Native tribes of America could. The African shamans and healers too.

(taking us to church)

But anything white science couldn't comprehend was labeled savagery while its "advanced" technologies and "civilized" diseases decimated the people who were here first. And if that wasn't enough, they brought us here to be tamed like the other animals they found. They tell you your knowledge, your beauty, your power is fantasy. Tell you, you can only be a Sambo, Pickanniny, Coon, Mammy. And even after all they've done, you believe them. So deeply you can't bare to see yourself the way nature would have you.

This one hits Anna hard.

She reaches instinctively to her head wrap.

AMOS (CONT'D)

You call these "superstitions?"
Well. They are in fact tributaries
leading to rivers and oceans of
truth about what you really are.
And who you might have been.

(moment settles)

Now will someone pass the salt?

Amos digs into his food while the table falls quiet.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen's small and drab. Anna mechanically puts away silverware. Maxine steals glances in between the dishes.

MAXINE

You never bring Julius. You guys
good?

ANNA

Great. Really great. His show's
doing well. Our show, really.

Maxine passes by Anna. Sniffs.

MAXINE

You're not smoking again?

ANNA

City buses...

Anna helps dry the dishes. Suddenly. Tears.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Auntie... why does he hate me?

Maxine removes her gloves. Holds Anna tight.

MAXINE

Hey, no.. No..

ANNA

What did I do? Why even take me in?

MAXINE

Your uncle Amos is your biggest
fan. Whose idea do you think it was
to buy that tape recorder after you
started talking about "wanting to
be a DJ?" Wasn't cheap either.
Neither were all those Sandra
movies, records, posters...

ANNA
So what's his problem?

MAXINE
He's a stubborn blow hard. He knows Compton and Black Academia. But what you're up to? He doesn't know that world. He can't protect you from it. He's afraid you not following in his footsteps like Linda, might lead you down the path your father took.

ANNA
Why would I follow in his footsteps? So I can bust my ass working sixty-hour weeks at a public school? Just to barely make enough to pay back all that debt and rent 700 square feet in Compton?

Maxine loosens her hug. Walks to the stove.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I didn't mean it like that.

MAXINE
950 square feet. That we own. Okay? May not be much, but it's a hell of a lot more than my mother had.

ANNA
I'm sorry. It's all I ever needed.

Anna re-calibrates.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I got no right to talk. I live in a shoebox I can't afford just cause it's two blocks down from Sunset.

MAXINE
You gotta look the part, I get it. But you're making rent?

Silence.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
Anna, your credit. You can't --

ANNA
-- Landlord raised the rent five hundred bucks. I'll figure it out.

MAXINE
Five hundred?!

Maxine goes to a drawer. Pulls out a check book.
Writes a check for five hundred dollars.

ANNA
(Thank God)
Auntie, no.

MAXINE
Your uncle doesn't know about this
account. You'll pay me back once
your show comes through. Okay?

Amos's deep belly laughs erupts from the living room.
Linda laughs too, sharing a moment with her father.
Amos glances back and sees Anna staring. A pang of guilt.
Maxine's hands float to Anna's head wrap. Tugs at it.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
So, Miss superstar. You finally
going to do something about this?

Anna moves a protective hand to her head wrap.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
I know you don't let anybody in
there but wigs have come a long way
since --

ANNA
-- Auntie...

Anna scratches the remnants of her scar beneath the wrap.

MAXINE
Just want you looking your best for
your big debut. I love you so much.

Anna eyes her small childhood home. Contempt.

EXT. BLUDSO HOME - NIGHT

Anna stands at the threshold, hugging Maxine.
Amos waits for an opening and moves in to hand his book, *Da
Ways Ah White Folks* to Anna. Maxine gives them a moment.

AMOS
Be careful with this.

Anna runs her hands delicately over the artifact, confused.

ANNA

What did you want me to do with it?

AMOS

It's a book. People read them.

ANNA

I'm good.

AMOS

Hey. I'm sorry. I forget to leave professor Bludso at work sometimes.

Anna lightens at this. A bit.

ANNA

Yeah, it's fine. I just... think Kieren might be more into --

AMOS

-- You don't think you're into folklore? What about when it involves a fly girl making it big in the city played by Sandra?

Anna smiles at this. He's trying.

ANNA

A fly girl, huh?

AMOS

It's all folklore. Thing is, the stories that run the world as sure as the sun are always theirs.
(gives it back)
These are ours. Mine.

Anna's holds the book close.
Amos wipes her forehead and kisses it.

INT. BUS - DAY

Anna hold's Amos' book.
Slides an envelope from inside and checks its contents.
Five hundred bucks. Still there.
The sardine-packed bus screeches to a halt.

EXT. MID-WILSHIRE - MORNING

Anna walks down a desolate Sunday morning street.
Sucks down a cigarette.
Anna scratches the scar down her nape, singing to herself.

ANNA

One Night. What's happening to me?

She glares inside rows of hair salons.
 Affluent white women bond and get fresh looks...
 Anna stops before a new modern store-front: Virgie's.

INT. VIRGIES - EVENING

Anna enters the pristine blinding white of Virgie's Salon.
 A far cry from the cozy, casual salons in Compton.

FRYING SOUNDS and chatter as hairdressers unbraid, comb and
 all but apply weaves to black upscale clients. Weaves are for
 VIRGIE to apply alone. Black woman. 40's. Sweet smile.

HOSTESS

Yes?

DENISE. Entitled. Unbothered.

ANNA

Wow. Um... are your prices listed?

DENISE

For a sewn in? Hair and service is
 four-fifty.

ANNA

Four hundred and fifty?

DENISE

And Virgie's earliest appointment
 is the fifteenth. Of...February.

ANNA

You don't do walk-ins?

DENISE

Supercuts does.

ANNA

Sista look. I work in TV. I'm
 actually a VJ? On Culture? And girl
 to girl. I really need this.

DENISE

I can see that. Look, I don't know
 how things are... in your hood or
 wherever, but this is a world-class
 salon, okay? I'm sure you can find
 somewhere else to get "hooked up."

Anna deflates but then walks right past Denise.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Excuse me?!

Fear flashes on Virgie's face.

VIRGIE
Uh, Denise?

ANNA
Please. I just need a moment.

DENISE
Miss thing!

ANNA
You ever had a dream? One you'd be
willing to do anything for?

DENISE
Okay Polly, you betta' get to
steppin'!

Virgie sizes Anna up.

VIRGIE
Very few things are worth doing
anything for, baby.

ANNA
Right. Especially when everyone
around you says you can't do it.
Says you don't deserve it. Says you
don't belong where you know your
destiny tells you to be. Sista,
have you been there?

This strikes a chord.

VIRGIE
Just because people tell you
something over and over again,
don't make it true.

ANNA
Yeah, well your girl keeps telling
me that the only appointment with
you is three months from now. And I
need this today. Please.

VIRGIE
Did someone send you here?

Virgie peers into Anna. Poor thing.
Anna realizes the eyes of EVERY CLIENT are silently on her.

ANNA
Uh... yeah. Rosalyn?

VIRGIE
Rosalyn...

Virgie ponders. Sympathetic eyes land on her from all over the salon. Not from Denise though. She hates everyone.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)
Okay. It'll be my good deed for the day.

Anna lights up as Denise rolls her eyes.

DENISE
You can wait over there until she can slip you in.

ANNA
How long do you --

Denise shuts Anna up with an "are you crazy" look.

Anna walks over to the waiting area near the front.
There's a pile of magazines. On the top:
Essence featuring Sandra and a newer, longer, fuller weave:

"The Sew-In Revolution" a sub-head proclaims.

Anna grabs the magazine and slides it on top of "Da Ways Ah White Folks" book. Starts to read. And wait...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. VIRGIES - NIGHT

Anna jolts awake to a tap on her shoulder. Open magazines spread on her lap. It's...

VIRGIE
Alright baby, let's find her.

Anna looks around. Shops empty. It's the dead of night.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

The room is white. Sterile.
Hair flows from fabric scalps.

Hung from blonde to black on spiraling racks.
A rattling A/C vent keeps them in constant motion.

ANNA
They all look...great.

VIRGIE
Touch them. You'll feel it.

Anna runs her fingers through the brunettes.
The strawberry blondes. The reds. She feels silly.

Anna rounds the maze of spiral racks.
A scalp of silky black hair wafts from one.
Anna puts her fingers through it. Pauses.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)
I thought so.

ANNA
I really do feel something.

VIRGIE
Clients swear the stuff is magic.

Virgie takes the hair from the rack.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)
You know, in India a woman's hair
is her most prized possession. It's
the greatest sacrifice she can make
to her gods.

ANNA
This came all the way from India?

VIRGIE
Forget where it's from. Let's
concentrate on where's it going.

VIRGIE'S CHAIR - MOMENTS LATER

Three combs. Wide tooth, fine, and a pick. Stainless steel.
Virgie's instruments.

Anna glares at them as she walks over from the dryer.

VIRGIE
You're not tender headed are you?

FLASHBACK POP: Anna's chemical burn SIZZLES and PULSES.

ANNA
I'll be fine.

Sounds from the shop fade.
All you hear is Anna's breath and the scrape of metal combs.

QUICK CUTS:

Virgie pries her hair apart.
Forms the first of several long braids. Chats.
Anna in agony. Each follicle TUGS at her reddening scalp.

The cornrows start. Virgie pulls them tight. And small.
Each twist like a tiny stab.
She snakes the rows from Anna's part around her head.
Around the scar.

Virgie threads a long sharp needle. Curved. Like a hook.
Virgie digs into a braid.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Ah!

VIRGIE
Sweetheart...

Anna yanks. Draws blood from the hook needle.

ANNA
I'm sorry. I've never... had my
hair done before.

Virgie puzzles at this. Breathes deep. This will be tough.

Virgie digs the thread through her perimeter braid.
Worms a thread to attach a hair strand around her base.
Then digs and sews the row above that.
Then the row above that.
Then the row above that.

Anna's eyes are red. A tear rolls gently down her cheek.
Denise looks up from a magazine. Then back down.

Anna's head is arduously filled in except her crown.
Virgie knots a special piece around it.
Around and around. It's too much.

FLASHBACK POP: Anna screams. Her chemical burn pulsing.

VIRGIE
Anna.

ANNA
Sorry!

More blood. Virgie works around it.
Closing in on the last of Anna's visible head.

Anna's done. Her eyes roll back. She's out.

EXT. PLANTATION - NIGHT

You stare into the black of night as storm clouds roll in.
Your gaze falls to a tree covered in black moss.
Beyond it is a dilapidated Plantation home.
A dark figure runs from it. Coming closer. And closer.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

The scene is interrupted by the sight of a rope as it
tightens around a bronze neck. You hear CHANTING.

INT. VIRGIE'S CHAIR - NIGHT

With a SNAP, Anna's eyes pop open. She's back in the shop.
Virgie smiles.

VIRGIE

You're not the first to faint.

Virgie hands Anna some water. She drinks as Virgie turns her
chair toward the mirror.

ANNA

It's...

VIRGIE

Stunning.

Anna is a new woman. Her face made sharper. More European.
Framed by the straight layered jet-black hair.

Virgie pulls a pink bottle from a drawer with a hook nozzle.
No label, save for ingredients in fine print.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)

Essential oils for your scalp. You
wanna get it between your braids at
least twice a day. Trust me. And
never get it wet. Get your shampoo
and some water, mix it in a bottle
with a nozzle and...

Virgie lifts the weave / braid line just enough to stick the
tip of a nozzle clad bottle underneath. Anna winces.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)
You'll get used to it. That's how you
clean your scalp. Make sure it
dries completely each time, okay?

Anna just stares at her reflection in awe.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)
It's gonna hurt for the first week
or so. A lot. But that's normal for
your first time. Once you're
through it, it'll never be this bad
again. Okay?

The jingle of a new customer entering.

WOMAN (O.S.)
I thought you said there wouldn't
be anybody else here?

VIRGIE
She's leaving.

Anna gets up. The blood runs out her face. It's...

SANDRA
When she tells you not to get it
wet. Believe her.

Her hair is a matted nightmare.

VIRGIE
What in the hell Sandra?

SANDRA
Rained at the venue. The manager
wanted a Diana Ross moment.

VIRGIE
Have a seat.

ANNA
Such a fan. I work for Culture TV.
Love, love the new video.

SANDRA
So does the label.

Sandra in real life is dry. Joyless.
Sandra breezes by as Anna stumbles over to Denise.

DENISE
Four fifty.

Anna takes all but a fifty from her envelope.
She stares as Virgie pokes at the mess on Sandra's head.

DENISE (CONT'D)
You're really not going to tip?
After all that?

Anna's eyes dart back to Denise. She hesitantly pulls out the last fifty and places it on the counter.
Denise swipes (and pockets) the money.

Anna exits. Locks eyes with Sandra. Vacant. Threatening.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Pink liquid oozes from underneath Anna's scalp.
She tries to massage her scalp with trembling fingers.
Pain pills everywhere. Anna takes a swig of Vodka.
A flood of pain rushes over Anna.

ANNA
JESUS!

Commercials on TV. White people sell true love via hair gel.
Anna presses play on her VCR. The Sandra movie she loves.
Sandra interviews at a news station. You remember the line.

SANDRA (ON TV)
You ever had a dream? One you'd be
willing to do anything for?

Anna's phone rings as she gulps down more Vodka.
Tape rolls in her answering machine.

EDNA (V.O.)
Hey. It's Edna. It's happening a
lot faster than I thought. And I
want you by my side. Call me sis.

Edna hangs up. BANGING AT THE DOOR.

ANNA
Fuck!

LANDLORD (O.S.)
THIS IS IT! THIS IS FUCKING IT!

Anna goes to the TV...

SANDRA (ON TV)
Especially when everyone around you
says you can't do it. Says you
don't deserve it--

...flicks it off. More BANGING. The pain has her on edge. Finally, rushes toward the door and flings it open.

ANNA

WHAT?!

BAXTER TANNEN. 40. Anna's landlord.
Hirsute wife-beater bound body. Completely plastered.

BAXTER

The fucking rent! That's what!

ANNA

I paid it. The increase happened
after --

BAXTER

-- The increase happened when I say
it did. Five hundred bucks. Now.

Baxter eyes Anna's hair with glossy eyes.

ANNA

I don't have it okay? What you gon'
do? Drag me out into the street in
the middle of the night?

Baxter's eyes drift from the hair to Anna's waist.

BAXTER

Oh I'd love to sweetheart. But the
cops will do that for me.

Baxter turns. Anna steps into the hallway.
Her door lined with eviction notices.

ANNA

Wait!

Baxter returns. Puts his hand on the door. Widens the gap.
Looks over his shoulder.

BAXTER

Yes?

ANNA

What can I do? Please.

BAXTER

Find a way to pay me.

Baxter runs his fingers through Anna's hair.
He removes his hand. Anna's hair... flutters. Back in place.
As if a subtle breeze floated into the room.

Baxter pushes the door open and walks in. Sniffs.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
You smoking in here?

ANNA
I don't smoke...

Baxter laughs seeing the lit cigarette by her window. Takes a puff. He heads back to the door. Get's real close. Closes it behind Anna. She's trapped.

BAXTER
Want me to cut you a break?

Anna's hand goes to push Baxter away.
He grabs it and pulls her closer.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
Break me off a little something.

ANNA
Please don't.

BAXTER
Why don't you put on some music.
Help you relax?

Anna slides from under him. Switches the TV to Culture. A tender love ballad by a Johnny Gill type.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
Turn it up sweet heart. Thin walls.

Anna, terrified, does what he says.
He moves in on her. Pushes her up on top of the TV.
His hands move to the base of her skull. Tugs on her hair.

ANNA
AAAAAA!

Baxter puts his hand on her mouth.

BAXTER
Hey don't do that. Be a good girl.

Anna nods "ok" as Baxter's hands move to her pants.
Anna's eyes. Are they lighter?

JOHNNY GILL TYPE (ON TV)
*Girl take all this love! I know its
what you been dreamin' of...*

Anna's hands make there way up Baxter's hairy back.
 Her eyes definitely lighter.
 Her nails dig into his flesh.
 He struggles to penetrate her.
 Hair fluttering more.
 Blood trickles from the scratches Anna makes on his back.

BAXTER

Fuck, you're a wild one.

Her hair SCATTERS. As if a GUST OF WIND hit it.
 The window is open. But that can't be it.

Strands of hair land on Baxter's open cuts. But they don't pull away. They MAKE CONTACT. Strand after strand.

Baxter's beeper goes off.
 Looks at the message and back to Anna uneasily.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Gonna have to be some other time,
 though...

The ballad's in overdrive on Culture as the singer pitches woo. Unnecessary fabric everywhere. Women covered in honey.

Baxter leaves as Anna stares. Her breath calming.
 Her eyes back to normal.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anna dumps an empty Vodka bottle into the trash.
 Panic and anxiety. Her hair flutters a bit.
 She closes the window. This time it is the wind.

Anna crawls into bed. Wraps her hair. Weary.
 Culture TV has given way to infomercials.
 White people sell you cookware and the American dream.

Anna cuts it off. Closes her eyes.
 Nope. Not happening.
 She opens them. Can't settle into a sleep.

MEOWWW. Edgar sits atop Anna's father's book.
 She reaches and grabs him. And the book too.
 She opens it up and scans:

"The witch tried to return to ha skin, but couldn't on account of da salt. 'Skinny, don't you know me!' the witch cried, but the salt burned her every-time she tried to slip back in her own skin."

Anna frowns and flips.

"DA WAYS AH WHITE FOLK: First dey was only the wild beasts and the Red Man. Then the White Man came and brought us."

Anna's eyes are finally heavy.

"Usin' dat African Hoodoo, slaves use ta done up and fly away. Dat is until de slave owners figga out dat salt, white like them, took away de magic in the bones of dey slaves. That's how mammy come to put all that salt in the stew."

Anna flips to the dog-eared **"THE MOSS TREE"**

"They say the house negress was a plain woman, till she took up walking in dem woods. She see trees covered in black moss so fine it look like massa's hair. De plain negrees asked the Tree for hair like that and the tree said yes. She came back looking so fine, eben Massa would look at her in that way."

Anna chuckles. Keeps reading though her eyelids weigh.

"Massa's wife grew jealous and told massa dat de Negress musta taken up dat Hoodoo."

Anna has a rope around her neck. She looks up. You are in...

EXT. PLANTATION - DREAM

... her dream.

She sees the crumbling plantation amidst a storm.
A dark figure running towards her. No... toward you. A BLACK WOMAN.
Draped in a flowing black dress. She's... terrified.

CUT TO:

A rope around a bronze neck. An old NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN.
She opens her mouth to laugh. No teeth.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNA'S CHILDHOOD BATHROOM - DREAM

The chemical burn sizzles. ANNA SCREAMS.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Anna's eyes pop open.
Edgar rests atop her father's open book.

INT. MVT LOBBY - DAY

You stare from Anna's POV as she walks through the lobby.
White stares of awe. Wonder. Lust.

The White Female Exec Anna always watches is surrounded by
enthralled male execs in a glass-walled room.
She spots Anna. Winks at her.

It's the hair. It bounces and flows. Anna does a hair toss.

ANNA

Ow.

Too soon. Downs a couple Aspirin from her purse.
She passes a row of monitors. Culture has a news alert.
Afriqué appears with an image of REGGIE WATSON, the actor
from Sandra's video and her old movies.

AFRIQUÉ (ON TV)

The body of Reggie Watson was found
outside his Los Angeles home today.
Watson, who was famous for playing
love interest to Sandra both on and
off screen went missing...

INT. CULTURE OFFICES - DAY

You notice some Black executives have been replaced by White
ones. A few more pressed hair styles among the P.A.'s.
Anna passes by the TV Bank.

AFRIQUÉ

...found bloodless leaving
authorities baffled as to the
cause. In a statement Sandra
expressed "deep grief..."

Anna approaches Julius. He brushes his hair and eyes her.

JULIUS

Anna...

Anna just walks past. His eyes are still on her. She's sure.

Anna rounds a corner as Zora approaches.
Zora snaps at Anna with approval.
Anna pulls her hair behind her ears and smiles.

INT. CUBICLE ROW - LATER

Anna pours over Billboard charts. She turns a page and...

ANNA

Ah!

Paper cut. Reflexes bring her finger to her mouth. Suddenly--

ROSALYN

Wow. It... You look good girl!

ANNA

Hey! Thanks to you.

ROSALYN

You know I probably shouldn't say this, but... fuck it, I can tell you're cool. When I first started for Zora... all the emphasis on the "look?" Wasn't my thing. At all. But it does help us navigate. She right about that girl. Oh! There's a planning meeting in the conference room at eleven. Zora wants you there.

ANNA

She does?

ROSALYN

She does!

Anna smiles as Rosalyn scuttles off. Looks back down at her cut. A strand of hair has fallen in it.

ANNA

Ew.

Anna grimaces. Yanks her finger. But the strand is in deep. Like a needle, Anna pulls an inch of hair out of the wound. She marvels at how this happened only to realize...

The wound is now bloodless.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM A - EVENING

Anna enters. Around the table sit a few PRODUCERS, half black vets and half white new comers. Brook Lynne, Afriqué and Sista Soul eye Anna and her hair. Betrayal.

Anna's got other eyes too. The men in the room, especially the white ones, want to drink Anna up. A WOMAN PA who's transitioned to weave also eyes her hungrily.

She slinks in and walks to the only open seat. Next to Julius.

JULIUS
(sotto)
You look amazing

ANNA
(sotto)
Your breath smells like anus.

Rosalyn places Anna's proposal before Zora.

ZORA
Thanks.
(to the group)
So here's where I'm at. No more
cooking shows. Hair shows. Endless
blocks of Anita Baker.

SISTA SOUL
What's wrong with Anita Baker?

BROOK LYNNE
Look all I know is Hair Beat got
mad ratings, so you can --

ZORA
-- yes, a point six and five share
would make me mad too.

Anna scratches an itch on her head.

BROOK LYNNE
That ain't that bad for cable.

ZORA
Brook, you're better than Hair
Beat. Your personality? With
clothes that fit? You could be a
star. Sista Soul... well you could
be something too. I mean the quiet
storm is a bit too loud on this
channel I'm afraid. I like the
whole authentic earthy persona but
we got to find you a new lane.

SISTA SOUL
This isn't a persona.

The itch gets worse as Anna scratches harder.

AFRIQUÉ
What about my Heritage Hour?

ZORA
What about it? No one's watching.

AFRIQUÉ

Our heritage is who we --

ZORA

-- Girl, what part of Africa are you even from? Michigan?

Scratch. Scratch. Fuck. Anna scratches HARDER.
A PAIN SHOOTS UP her face. She tries to cover it up.

BROOK LYNNE

You can't come up in here trying to make us into something we're not.

ZORA

I don't want to change you. Just them. I want you more... whatever all this is. This I can sell advertising around.

Anna reaches a shakey hand to her purse. Aspirin.

ZORA (CONT'D)

We needn't be precious in here. Anna, can you back me up?

SISTA SOUL

You been talking to her about us?

ANNA

I didn't say anything like that.

Zora glares coldly at Anna as if betrayed. Anna slips the Aspirin into her mouth. Fights the throbbing pain.

ZORA

Here's what I want to do. I want to create a programming centerpiece. Daily. Something fresh. A live call-in countdown show, that ranks viewers favorites. We need programming blocks to showcase these videos throughout the day in new and interesting ways.

Hearing her pitch out Zora's mouth shocks Anna.

NEW EXEC

You want us to reprogram an entire Network in six weeks?

ZORA

If you plan to still be working here in six weeks. Yes.

Glances exchange.

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - DAY

Anna's barely in the door.

ZORA

The hell was that back there?

ANNA

I'm just confused. You never commented on the proposal and suddenly --

ZORA

-- You being invited to a meeting of producers and hosts was my comment. You know I'm trying to be open. Trying to work with what I've got here, but all the... dead weight Edna stuck me with in there just keep fighting me at every turn. I hope you can talk some sense into your girlfriends, before I have to send them all packing.

Anna registers this.

ZORA (CONT'D)

That is if you're serious about being one of my girls.

(a beat)

Nice hair. Virgie's?

ANNA

Yeah...

ZORA

Has her signature.

Silence.

ZORA (CONT'D)

What?

ANNA

So are you giving me the show? Or?

Zora eyes Anna. Likes what she sees. Until her eyes rest on Anna's flats. Zora's disappointed. Anna clocks this.

ZORA

To host? Awful large bet to place
on someone who's never done it.

ANNA

Like the one Grant made on Julius?
Or is Julius somehow... special?

ZORA

You getting at something?

ANNA

Just seems like he's the only one
not under a microscope. Like he
gets special treatment...

ZORA

And why would he get that?

Anna shrugs.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Because we're fucking?

Whoa. Anna sobers.

ANNA

Well... I just mean... What?

ZORA

We're fucking. Is that going to be
a problem for you?

ANNA

Why would it be?

ZORA

I don't know. Why would it?

ANNA

Your personal life is your
business.

Zora rustles her hair. A stray strand floats to the ground.
Catches Anna's attention... As it reverses...
And rejoins Zora's head. Before Anna can react.

ZORA

The live show is all hands on deck.
Everyone's working on it. I'll
decide who's lead when I can see
what you all can do. Cool?

Anna registers this challenge.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Get your girls in line.

With that, Zora picks up her phone to make a call.

INT. CULTURE OFFICES - DAY

Anna walks then RACES through the office.
She reaches a closet turned dressing room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Julius looks up in surprise.

ANNA
Zora's who you been seeing?

Yes. It's written all over Julius' face. He gets up to close the door. Brush. Brush. Brush.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Nigga as soon as you get out the
hood off of my idea you call
yourself trading up?

JULIUS
Yo chill with that. Who all knows?

ANNA
Your girl just told me! And now I
swear she's fucking with me...

JULIUS
(turned on)
You never raised your voice with me
before.

ANNA
Fuck you.

JULIUS
Hey. I don't want this out there.

ANNA
Tell Zora that.

JULIUS
I will.

Julius smiles. Anna tries not to melt.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

I'm not the only one with secrets
you know.

(moves in close)

Unless you found someone else to do
that thing you like.

ANNA

What's that got to do with--

JULIUS

--It's a gossip office. I'd
appreciate your discretion. Okay?

Julius opens the door and sits down. Anna stumbles out.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An open Payless box reveals Anna's new heels. Passable.
Edgar laps up slimy chunks, freshly poured. Anna blows smoke
out the window. Flicks ashes into the open dumpster below.

Something's on her mind.

FLASHES OF JULIUS AND ZORA splice before you.
ONE NIGHT appropriately enough blares.

Her hair looks rougher. Tangled. Dry. She catches her
reflection in a mirror. Ugh... grabs a comb. It snags.

ANNA

Ow!

Anna looks back up at her reflection.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Oh my God!

A black face. So black you can't tell where the face ends and
the hair begins. A Pickaninny come to horrific life.

MORE BANGING.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Anna jolts awake. Her dad's book in hand. MORE BANGING. Anna
is terrified to approach the door. Until...

LINDA (O.C.)

Hey it's me! Just want to make sure
you're not dead!

Anna rushes to the door.

ANNA

Hi?

LINDA

(re: the hair)

Whoa... No wonder you haven't been to dinner in awhile. Dad is going to flip. And Mom!? Well she's going to love it.

ANNA

So nice seeing you too Linda...

Linda lifts up a bag of greasy food.

LINDA

You hungry? I was in your hood.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - LATER

The two sit at a breakfast nook in the tiny kitchenette. Bloody greasy burgers before them.

Anna pretends not to watch Linda pour all the salt on her fries while Linda pretends not to eye Anna's cubby hole of a space. She spots the Sandra wall.

LINDA

Some things never change.

A crack of thunder out the window.

ANNA

Guess I'm in for the night.

LINDA

Of course it rains! You got something I can wrap this with?

ANNA

Got you.

LINDA

You can't get that wet can you? Like, at all?

ANNA

Washing it is a total operation. Been itching like crazy too. I'm supposed to be constantly applying this stuff but I always forget. Probably dried out.

LINDA

Oh my God I have the worst heat
damage from my new girl at the
salon. What are you using?

Anna pulls out the bottle of pink lotion for Linda.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Tea tree oil, jojoba extract.
Porcine albumin. What's that?

Anna scratches at her neck.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Honey!

Linda comes around behind Anna. She flips her hair to reveal
a patchwork of little red bumps.

LINDA (CONT'D)

You must be allergic.

ANNA

No, it's human. I think my skin's
not used to having all that
brushing up against it.

You notice Anna's hair has plopped into the bloody plate.
Linda frowns at the bumps but her attention is pulled by:
"Da Ways" book on Anna's bed.

LINDA

You're the one hogging this?

Linda grabs the book.

ANNA

I'm still reading it.

Anna pulls her hair back.
She spots her plate. Bloodless. Her burger grey. Shit.

LINDA

It's been over a month.

ANNA

Girl well then take it.

Anna stacks the plates and whisks them to the sink.

LINDA

Hey I wasn't done!

Anna pauses.

LINDA (CONT'D)

It's fine. Kieren says I've put on a few. Hey does Julius love it? Bet he does.

ANNA

Yeah he's into it. But it's not even that... I mean... it's like this whole time there was another world everyone else was a part of but me. People look me in the eye now and smile. I feel... I don't know. I feel. Good.

Linda plops before Anna's TV. Culture's on. Black people selling you opulence via music video.

LINDA

You probably have all these people on speed dial.

ANNA

Not all of them.

(beat)

Linda you're doing amazing. Your fiancé's a genius. You're changing the world.

LINDA

Kieren always jokes about how he never sees me.

(a beat)

But honestly I think I get so busy cause... I'm tired of asking myself where he is all the time. How and why a college History professor can't ever seem to make it home in time for dinner. This is who I'm supposed to raise kids with?

Anna doesn't have words. She puts her hand on Linda's

LINDA (CONT'D)

I should get going. But first...

Linda pulls out a wrapped present from her purse.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Go on.

Anna grabs a pair of scissors and cuts open the package. Cassettes. "THE BLUDSO RADIO SHOW" scribbled on the front.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Found them in the attic helping
mom.

ANNA
I think I made you do these just so
the kids at school would believe
the light skinned girl with the
good hair really was related to me.

Linda smiles bittersweetly with a touch of envy.

LINDA
And now look at you.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Anna hugs Linda and closes the door behind her.
She plops a cassette into a boombox. You remember the moment.

ANNA (TAPE)
You're tuned into Bludso on the
radio. Stage one of my dramatic
transformation is almost complete.

Anna smiles and heads to the bathroom.
A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

ANNA (CONT'D)
One sec!

Anna walks over and opens it...

ANNA (CONT'D)
Forget something Lin--

It's Baxter Tannen.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Mr. Tannen... How may I --

BAXTER
-- We gotta do this again?

ANNA
Do what?

He pushes his way in.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I've got your money this month.

BAXTER
Why don't you hold on to it?

Baxter grabs at Anna's waist.

ANNA
You been drinking Mr. Tannen?

BAXTER
Don't do that.

Baxter closes the door.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
You're not the only one, you know.
I know the game.

Silence as Baxter glares at Anna.
She goes to run out the door.
He stops her. Laughs.
They struggle.
He pushes her onto the bed. Climbs on top.
Her hair wriggles.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
Relax baby. Black pussy is a
passion of mine.

Anna realizes what this is. What it could be.
Hides her panic behind a faux intrigue.

ANNA
What about the thin walls?

Baxter smiles.

BAXTER
Go 'head.

Anna crawls from under his sweaty body. and walks over to
turn her TV up. THE FELLAS, a BBD style group dance and sing.

THE FELLAS (ON TV)
*We can't do what lovers do. I gotta
break you, break you.*

Anna turns.
Baxter's behind her.
He pushes her body into the wall.
You see them. The scissors.
Anna reaches for them.
Her hair ripples. Like a draft in the room.
The window's closed.

Baxter rips at her skirt.
 The scissors. Almost there.
 He pulls down his pants. Almost --

BAXTER

FUCK!

BLOOD oozes from Baxter's shoulder.
 He pulls the scissors out. More blood.
 He KNOCKS ANNA to the ground.

She hits her head. PAIN JOLTS THROUGH HER.
 Her eyes. They're becoming hazel again.
 She writhes as if in a state of shock.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

You're gonna get it now.

THE FELLAS (ON TV)

*Girl go on be free. Why you wanna
 kick it with a man like me?*

Baxter grabs Anna and throws her on her bed.
 As he moves toward her, her hair worms and wriggles.
 The hazel fades. Anna's back in the moment.

BAXTER

The hell?

Anna's hair floats around Baxter for a moment.
 As if in water. It's almost beautiful.

The hair stiffens. Braids itself.
 Wraps around Baxter's hands. Pulls them apart.

The remaining unbraided hair STIFFENS and worms its way
 hungrily INTO BAXTER'S WOUND.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

AAAAAAHHHHHH!

The hair squeezes around his wrists. Tighter. Tighter.
 Burrows deeper and deeper into his wound. Drinking.
 Anna watches as life drains from Baxter.
 Bound to him by the hair.

ANNA

OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD.

Anna tries to detangle her hair from the body.
 But the hair ain't letting go. Strands find their way into
 Baxters mouth, nose, eyes - draining him of blood.

Anna panics. Tries to break free. Finally, the hair lets go. It's had its fill.

Anna scurries away from Baxter's gray bloodless body. Shaking. Hyperventilating. WTF is happening? What's she done?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Anna races to the mirror. TUGS AT HER WEAVE. Working the knots, yanking at the whole apparatus.

She doesn't see the hair braid and gently worm around her wrists. They pull her hands away from her head.

ANNA
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU?! ANSWER ME!

Anna's eye go hazel.

CUT TO:

INT. ANNA'S MIND

Black. The running woman covered in hair. The black face of the horrific real life Pickaninny. The Native American woman.

BACK TO:

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Anna's eyes fade to normal.

ANNA
Why me? What do you want with me?

Her eyes go hazel as the hair communicates (?) with her.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I don't want your protection...

Hazel again. In the mirror Anna's sees:
The White Female Exec. Her hair perfect and blonde.

Anna calms. Lowers her hands. The hair releases.

Anna's image in the mirror now. She's beautiful.
She fluffs the hair as if being seduced by it.
As if to tell herself this is worth it.

She peers out of her bathroom at Baxter's bloodless corpse.

EXT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

From a distance you see Anna's window. Ten stories up.
The light in her apartment goes out. Her window sill goes up.

She lugs something to the sill. Pushes with all her might.
Into a jumble of trees tumbles the body of Baxter Tannen.
Right into the open dumpster.
Its lid falls closed on impact.

FADE OUT.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Anna's eyes open. Did she even sleep? Sandra on the radio.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT HALLWAY - MORNING

Anna closes and locks her door.
Turns to see something that makes her heart drop:

EXT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A cop car and an ambulance.
Residents in all states of dress gawk.
Anna spots a neighbor she knows. Black woman. 30s. GINA.

GINA

Girl they found Mr. Tannen dead.
Body in the dumpster.

ANNA

Oh. No.

GINA

Mmhmm. Door to the roof was open.
Empty bottles of gin everywhere.
Bet he slipped. Drunk ass.

ANNA

Slipped. Yeah. How horrible.

GINA

Good riddance. You know he tried to
raise my rent by five hundred
dollars? Had to threaten to sue his
ass. He try that shit with you?

ANNA

No... Thank God.

FEMALE VOICE
He tried to rape me.

Anna and Gina turn to see a BLACK NEIGHBOR.

BLACK NEIGHBOR
Every-time I was late. Hope there's
a hell. Bastard.

INT. MVT OFFICES - DAY

Anna struts down the lobby. Passes by Grant Madison and his gaggle of assistants. He's captivated this time.

GRANT
(to assistant)
She work here?

Anna smiles. Walks by a bank of MVT tuned TV's.

WHITE MVT VJ (TV)
Now for something different from
us. Princess of soul Sandra is
quickly becoming the Queen of Pop
as her new single "One Night" races
up the charts. Making her MVT
premiere, here's Sandra.

INT. ~~CULTURE~~ CULT LOBBY - DAY

A renovation in full effect. Geometric shapes and clean lines start to replace the drab decor of Culture's past.

You follow behind Anna as she exits the elevator.
People smile at her. Say good morning. SEE her.

EXEC ROW

Anna breezes by. More white men and women. More weaved PA's. They all make sure to greet Anna. She warms at this. Then Julius passes and licks his lips. Anna glares through him.

INT. ANNA'S DESK - DAY

Anna opens up her pay check. Her face frowns.

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Rosalyn opens the door for Anna as Zora ends a call.

ANNA

This'll be quick. I just... think there's been a mistake on my pay.

ZORA

What? Come here...

Anna brings over the check which Zora eyes. She grins.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Darling this isn't a mistake. It's called a raise. You're a producer. It's embarrassing to pay you an assistant's wage.

ANNA

Oh... Sorry, Edna always had trouble getting more money for Culture.

ZORA

Culture's dead.

The phone rings. Anna scurries.
Trades a look of pride with Rosalyn as she exits.

EXTENDED MONTAGE TO "DON'T BE CRUEL" BY BOBBY BROWN.

1) INT. WORD PROCESSING CLOSET - NIGHT

Anna at a word processor types: LIVE CALL IN SHOW TALENT:

2) INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Zora frustrated in a meeting with:

AFRIQUÉ

I'm not changing my aesthetic just to fit some trend.

BROOK LYNNE

Same. I'm a real bitch.

Anna flips her hair and takes over.

ANNA

Aren't you tired of it? The way everyone at MVT looks at us? Like we're second class citizens? You know MVT started airing the Sandra video and called it a premiere? Come on. We're better than them.

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

The future could be ours ladies and
you wanna trip over your hairstyle?
Your set colors?

SISTA SOUL

I'm so disappointed in you Anna but
your bangs are really disarming.

BROOK LYNNE

Ugh, I know right!!

AFRIQUÉ

Even I am having a hard time
staying upset.

3) INT. WORD PROCESSING CLOSET - NIGHT

Anna types: ONE OF A KIND SET. She's been at it for hours.

4) EXT. MVT LOT - DAY

Anna struts to the SOUND STAGES behind the MVT building.
Celebs, MVT VJ's, you name it - they all have eyes for her.

CUT TO:

INTERRUPTION OF MONTAGE - Anna, keeled over in pain, reaching
for the pink bottle in her purse.

BACK TO:

5) INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Anna arrives at an abandoned soundstage with an MVT exec in
tow. As she soaks in the possibilities.

MVT EXEC

What do you think?

ANNA

I love it.

MVT EXEC

No... about dinner sometime.

6) INT. SWANKY APARTMENT - NIGHT

The MVT exec and Anna devour each other lustily while candles burn at a table set for two. Steak was served.

CUT TO:

INTERRUPTION OF MONTAGE - Anna stumbles down the street, pulls left-over steak wrapped in a napkin from her purse. Rips it open until blood and juices run down her arms. Strands of hair ripple their way to drink it up.

BACK TO:

7) INT. ZORA'S OFFICES - DAY

Zora and Julius all but make out. A KNOCK stirs them as Anna pokes her head in.

ANNA

Zora. I just wanted to let you know
we secured 1-800-CUL-TURE.

ZORA

Amazing.

Julius eye fucks Anna as she exits. Zora clocks this.

8) INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Anna marvels at the painters and decorators. The space is coming together. There's a YELL. Crew members rush over.

Anna follows to see a GRIP with an open wound on his knee. A flat fell on him. Crew rushes to help him stop the blood.

But Anna just stares. The blood oozes. It calls to her. She approaches as the sounds of chaos fade. All you hear is the beating of a heart. The blood pulses in unison.

Anna's eyes start to glow. But she snaps herself out of it. Smiles and exits.

9) INT. WORD PROCESSING CLOSET - NIGHT

Anna types: CULT KOOL AID. Deletes. Types: CULT CALL IN. Deletes. Types: CULT LIVE. That's it. She hits print.

END OF MONTAGE & MUSIC CUE

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - DAY

Zora glares over her mug of tea at Anna.

ANNA

...and by incorporating all the VJs
we reinforce those brands as well.
Julius for the stars. Brook Lynne
covers hip hop. Afriqué has news.

ZORA

Sista Soul?

Anna sighs. Shrugs.

ANNA

I don't know where she fits...

ZORA

Then perhaps she doesn't.

Cold-blooded. Anna pauses before broaching.

ANNA

That just leaves a host.
(off Zora's silence)
I think you'd agree that no one
Grant's team suggested had that...
thing we're looking for?

Zora calculates behind decorated eyes. Warms her tone.

ZORA

And what are "we" looking for?

ANNA

Well you know I'm hoping we could
discuss me as --

ZORA

(little patience)
-- I know what you're angling for
Anna. And I see the work you're
putting in. I'm impressed.

Anna smiles. Pushes her hair behind her ears. Still dry.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Using the pink stuff?

ANNA

Yeah but...

ZORA
...it's not enough is it?

There's a despair in Zora's eyes.

ANNA
What... do you mean?

THERE'S A KNOCK. Julius cracks it open. Deer in headlights.

JULIUS
Oh... sorry.

ZORA
Anna was just leaving.

Anna swallows her pride and exits as if Julius isn't even there. One more thing to Zora:

ANNA
Can't wait for tonight.

INT. CULT OFFICES - DAY

Anna walks by Afriqué who scratches at a new weave.
She shoots Anna an annoyed glare.
Sista Soul strolls by. New weave.
Her earthy persona replaced by a chic curvy fashionista.

SISTA SOUL
All divas. The whole two hour
block. Hip hop and soul. We'll call
it "Ladies Night with Sista Soul."

Sista doesn't even bother to stay for the reaction.
She know she got it. Anna chuckles to herself.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Anna furiously squeezes what's left of the "pink stuff" into her hair. Nothing she does seems to work. It's tangled and worn. Anna's panicked. CATERWAULS from Edgar don't help.

Afriqué on TV:

AFRIQUÉ (TV)
Tragedy has struck Sandra's camp
again with the singer now reporting
that her long time manager, Corey
Davis has been missing for weeks.

Anna pulls the hair into a pony tail. Grabs a news boy cap and plops it on top. Better, but not ideal.

PAIN shoots through her. This time it's not the hair.

ANNA
Are you serious?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

You spot stray strands of hair everywhere. Drains. Toilet. Anna rummages through her medicine cabinet. There's a jar of BRITE WHITE BLEACHING CREAM. Brand new.

She continues to a box of maxi-pads. Rips open the pad's packing with her teeth. You see her hair stretch downwards.

Shock takes over Anna's face as the pad drops to the floor.

The hair reaching into her panties, taking care of itself. Anna's revulsion turns to... pleasure?

The hair reaches further and further into her. Drinking. A wave of ecstasy strikes Anna's face. The hair retreats.

Anna regains composure. The hair is healthy again. Lush. Anna fluffs it. Fuck she looks good. A sense of dirtiness washes over her though.

ANNA
This never happened.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Anna covered up in a trench coat stares out the window. The bus passes by Virgie's. Strange.

It's completely boarded up. A GLOW emanates from between one of the boards. Catches Anna's eye as the bus zooms off.

EXT. MVT LOT - NIGHT

The lot is decked out for a party. The CULT LIVE set open as The Fellas lip synch on its stage.

THE FELLAS
*Cause I'm caught in a trance when
I'm doing my dance...*

Anna, in a skin-tight dress, eyes Zora and Julius in a lovers quarrel. She hands her frumpy trench to a worker as...

BRITISH MVT VJ
Anna! You never called me back.

He's blonde and suave and tipsy.

ANNA
Baaaabe... I been busy.

BRITISH MVT VJ
Rubbish! I want you with me at the Madonna party! Call me back.

Friends whisk him away as you hear a voice you recognize.

EDNA
As I live and breathe...

ANNA
You made it!

Anna runs and embraces her old friend.

ANNA (CONT'D)
What do you think of everything?

EDNA
It's... all very different.

Anna catches Zora. Furious and confused. Julius is gone.

ANNA
What'd you say?

EDNA
Congratulations.

ANNA
We so need to catch up.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CULT OFFICES - NIGHT

Anna and Edna enter from the elevators mid conversation.

ANNA
Wait til you see it!

Edna looks around the new office. She's not impressed.

ANNA (CONT'D)
It's been quite an undertaking.

Silence.

EDNA
Your hair...

ANNA
Yeah. Can you believe it?

EDNA
Had to see it first.

More silence.

ANNA
It hasn't been easy. Without you.

EDNA
You seem to have adapted well.

ANNA
Had no choice.

EDNA
You always have a choice.

ANNA
Not always.

EDNA
Okay.

ANNA
Edna. What is it?

EDNA
Grant offered me the world to turn
what started out as for the
community by the community
into...this. I chose to walk away.

The two walk some more.

ANNA
You know I was almost evicted? When
the switch happened?

EDNA
There are other jobs you know. You
never returned my calls Anna. I had
something for you.

ANNA

I've got something good here. I
couldn't afford to start over.

EDNA

You couldn't afford that hair, but
that didn't stop you.

ANNA

Not with what you paid me.

EDNA

I did my best while maintaining my
integrity. Like I taught you to do.

ANNA

No. You taught me how low I'd have
to stoop to survive on two-hundred
and fifty dollars a week.

Edna turns to go. Anna's hair trembles.
Her eyes lighten.

ANNA (CONT'D)

She's giving me my show. More than
that, she's making it the
centerpiece of this channel!

EDNA

I hope it's worth it.

ANNA

It is!

Edna stops and turns.

EDNA

All I wanted to do is create a
place where girls like us didn't
have to do...

(gesturing towards Anna)

...all this just for a seat at the
table. That's what Culture was
about!

ANNA

Yeah well... Culture's dead.

Edna bites her tongue and heads down a stairwell.

ANNA (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Bitch.

AN ELEVATOR DING and CHUCKLES pulls Anna's gaze.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Julius?

Anna tiptoes towards his voice. Her hair worms.
Click clack. Click clack.
She slides her stockinged feet from gold heels.
She peers around a corner.
Just misses Julius and some woman.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Ah...

Anna's stepped on a thumbtack. Pulls it out. A bit of blood.
Her hair ruffles.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Not now, fuck.

Anna rounds the hallway towards the voices. There's a sliver
of light from a crack in Julius' dressing room.

Anna holds her breath. Aligns an eye with the door slit.

It's Julius. And...

CHRISTINA
Is that so?

... CHRISTINA, the blonde woman Anna admires from MVT.

JULIUS
I see how you look at me. Every
time I walk through that lobby.

Christina giggles as his hand roams up her shirt. Anna steps
back before the gasp escapes her lips. Hazel eyes and pain.
Anna shakes it off and walks away.

INT. CULT PARTY - NIGHT

Anna bustles through the party. She gets a double take from:

GRANT
Anna? Anna Bludso?

ANNA
Mr. Madison! Zora!

Anna walks over to the two of them.

GRANT

Word on the street is you're our secret weapon. Where did Zora find you?

ANNA

I've... worked here for four years.

Grant smiles over this.

GRANT

Zora shared your Cult Live plans. Brilliant. And look, you're going to get some push back about the whole host thing, but I'm all in.

ANNA

Yeah? You are?

Zora stays strangely quiet. A plastered smile on her face.

GRANT

Absolutely. There's no one better to have as the face of Cult Live.

ANNA

Wow. You really think so?

Another sharp pain up Anna's nape. She rubs at it. Zora clocks this.

GRANT

Zora back in front of the camera? Slam dunk. I don't care if the marketing guys says she's too old, audiences love her and Zora you don't look a day over forty.

Grant cheers to Zora who swallows this insult-pliment.

ANNA

Couldn't agree more.

Zora and Anna trade fake grins. Rosalyn arrives.

ZORA

Ros?

ROSALYN

Didn't see him anywhere. Anna, you haven't seen Julius have you?

ANNA

Not once all night.

Anna sips as Zora eyes the crowd behind a grin.

EXT. MVT OFFICES - NIGHT

Anna, Brook and Sista chat as Valets arrive with cars.

VALET

Miss?

Anna hands a slip to the valet.

SISTA SOUL

You want me to wait with you?

ANNA

Girl, I'm good. Goodnight!

The girls drive off in their cars.

VALET

Ma'am, this is a napkin.

Anna shrugs. She ain't got no car. Lights a cigarette and plants her back against the MVT building. Over her shoulder:

Julius runs after Zora who bee lines towards valet. Her car already waiting. Mercedes. Red.

JULIUS

Come on Zora! It's your party!

ZORA

And you've ruined it! Where the hell were you?

Julius can't answer. Zora gets in her car and speeds off. Julius fumes at this. Doesn't notice Anna watch him.

ANNA

Everything okay?

He startles. Turns to see Anna.

JULIUS

Hey. You smoking again?

Anna offers Julius one from her pack. He takes it. Julius lights it. Guilty eyes at Anna.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

You good?

Anna sucks down her cigarette. Rolls her eyes.

JULIUS (CONT'D)
She's... a monster Anna. Insecure.
Possessive. Manipulative.

ANNA
That must be awful.

JULIUS
I really fucked things up huh?
Yeah, I know I did. And know you
think I'm getting what I deserve.

ANNA
Four years with you. Never once met
you. Really. Until now.

Anna stomps on her finished cig.

JULIUS
Can I tell you something? Fuck...

ANNA
What?

JULIUS
I miss you. So, so much. It's not
right to say that, it's not fair to
you, but it's true.

Anna eyes him carefully.

JULIUS (CONT'D)
You ever? Miss me? I shouldn't ask
that.
(beat)
Right?

Anna shifts. So does her hair. Imperceptibly to Julius.

ANNA
Did you drive?

Julius grins. Finds and hands a ticket to the valet.

INT. JULIUS' LOFT - NIGHT

Anna steps into his open concept mini palace.
Lit by blue moonlight. Anna scans it with hazel eyes.

Julius warms it by sliding up a dimmer.
With a remote, he turns on a CD player installed into a wall.
Isley Brothers. "Let Me Down Easy."

Anna walks to the doorway of Julius' bedroom.
He pours two glasses of wine at a wet bar.

JULIUS
You seeing anybody Anna?

Silence.

JULIUS (CONT'D)
Anna?

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Julius finds her in his bedroom. She stares at his bed.

ANNA
It's stupid. I used to fantasize
about the one day when I'd wake up
in your bed and go to start packing
up my things and you'd grab me. And
hold me. And you'd say "Where are
you going Anna? This is your home."

She turns. A tear smears mascara down her face. Eyes brown.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I should go.

Anna goes to leave. Before she can pass him...

...he kisses her. Deeply. Hands on her face. Wiping tears.
Holding her tight by her waist. One of those movie kisses.

They break only to stare into each other's eyes.
The "are we doing this" look.

INT. JULIUS' BEDROOM - DAY

Wine glasses are placed on the nightstand.
Julius slams Anna onto his bed.
He's all over her. Kissing her. Grinding her.

Suddenly he's gone. Anna opens her eyes.
He slides open his nightstand drawer. Bondage gear.

JULIUS
Pick your weapon.

She reaches inside. Grabs a simple silk eye mask.

JULIUS (CONT'D)
That's it?

ANNA

I've got to get up early.

Anna slips the mask over Julius face and mounts him.
Runs her tongue up his abs. Her hair brushes his body.
She lands in a kiss as she allows him inside her..

ANNA (CONT'D)

Did you miss that, Jules?

He nods. Smacks her behind.

JULIUS

Miss that?

They start to fuck.

ANNA

The last time you were inside me.
Were you thinking of her?

JULIUS

What?

ANNA

Tell me.

JULIUS

Never.

ANNA

Do you think of me when you're
inside of her?

Julius pulls up his mask.

JULIUS

Anna...

(and then)

Your eyes.

Hazel and glowing.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

They've never looked so beautiful.

Anna slips the mask back over Julius' eyes.
Her hair writhes and braids as she rides him hard.

ANNA

What about that blonde chick from
MVT? Think of me when you're with
her?

Julius reaches for the mask again.

JULIUS
I don't know what --

ANNA
-- Just want to know I'm the best.

Anna's braided hair wraps around his wrists.
Holds them back from touching the mask.

JULIUS
You are baby. You are.
(feeling the braids)
Rope? Guess you changed your mind.

ANNA
Guess so.

Anna rides him hard. Her hair bouncing everywhere.

JULIUS
Fuck yeah. Ride it baby.

Her hair reaches the bed. It hadn't at the start of this.

ANNA
I'm the best?

JULIUS
You're the best.

Anna's hair gathers around Julius waist.
It was never this long.
Anna's hands move to his chest.
A passion in her eyes.
And something else.

ANNA
Best you ever had?!

JULIUS
THE FUCKING BEST I EVER HAD.

He pumps studiously.
Her hands on his neck now.

ANNA
Yeah?

JULIUS
(orgasms)
Yeah! Oh God...

Anna slows. But not for long.

ANNA
Then why'd you leave me baby?

JULIUS
What?

Anna hate fucks him raw. Faster. Harder.

JULIUS (CONT'D)
Hey baby. It's a little sensitive
right now...

Anna's hair fills the bed. She grabs one of the wine glasses.
Smashes it on the head board.

ANNA
I can relate.

And plunges it into Julius' abdomen.

JULIUS
An---

She fucks harder. The hair...it slithers up her hands.
Supporting as she stabs Julius to the rhythm of sex.

Anna orgasms as bloods flows from Julius.
A pool of red spreads into Julius' white sheets.
Her hair devours it. Her orgasm intensifies.

The hair trembles and pulses over Julius' body.
Like maggots devouring a carcass. Anna's eyes beam light.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANTATION - NIGHT

The black woman runs to you. Her body covered in, not a dress
but... hair. She screams. SALT IS DUMPED ONTO HER.

ANOTHER FLASH. The Native American woman again.

ANOTHER FLASH. Anna's childhood. The chemical burn pulses.

BACK TO:

INT. JULIUS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anna falls to the ground. Her hair retreats to normal. Her
eyes brown again. Anna sees Julius' feet on the bed above.

She rises slowly to see the rest of him.

A corpse. The open cut on his stomach reveals grey bloodless innards. In fact, there's no blood at all.

She screams bloodless murder.

EXT. JULIUS' LOFT - NIGHT

You watch Anna leave the apartment and run to a phone booth. A MANNING CO. truck parked on the street's other side.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

Panic courses through Anna as she waits to hear:

LINDA (PHONE)

Hello?

ANNA

Hey Linda it's Anna. Hey are you up? Can I come by?

LINDA

What? Why?

ANNA

I just, uh. You know that book? Unc's book? I wanted to see if I could come grab it?

LINDA

Right now?

ANNA

Yeah, I just... I really... It helps me sleep you know.

LINDA

Anna... I don't even think. Yeah, I left it at the office.

ANNA

Oh. Okay. I mean I can go over there...

LINDA

It's Midnight. Girl call Julius, I bet he can put you to sleep.

Anna want's to weep. But this is not the time.

ANNA

Linda... do you believe in... all that folklore stuff. Spirits and things.

(silence)

Linda?

LINDA

I mean... I don't know. What's this about Anna? You're scaring me.

ANNA

Oh... sorry girl. I... had a bit too much to drink tonight. I don't know what I'm even talking about. I'm just... Sorry. Love you. Bye.

Anna hangs up. The Manning Co truck drive off.

INT. CULT OFFICES - DAY

Co-workers float by like ghosts.
Some smile. Some double-take.

Anna's hair is... outrageous. Down to her ass. You'd swear it was natural too. The edges... the texture... perfection.

Anna can't take the attention. A SHOCK OF PAIN in her eyes.
She rounds the corner. And screams.

Startled by the sight of Christina at her desk.

CHRISTINA

Miss Bludso, I'm Christina.

ANNA

Hi.

CHRISTINA

I'm... your assistant.

ANNA

I don't have an assistant.

CHRISTINA

Oh... Julius said he talked to you?

(off Anna's silence)

I work downstairs. At MVT.
I've been interning down there for what feels like forever. But I've been dying to get to Cult as soon as I saw what you guys were doing.

(MORE)

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
I'm like the biggest Bobby Brown
fan of all time.

ANNA
And Julius told you he'd talk to
me? About being my...
(laughs at herself)
You're an intern?

CHRISTINA
Former intern. I hope?

ROSALYN
Anna!

ANNA
Did you know I was getting an
assistant?

ROSALYN
Uh... well it's about time, but...
(sotto)
I need you in Zora's office.

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - DAY

Anna opens the door. Her heart drops.
TWO COPS and a DETECTIVE stare at her.

ZORA
Close it! Close it!

Anna complies. Sits. Zora sits on her desk's edge.

ZORA (CONT'D)
He's run away with her. I know it.

LIEUTENANT
With who?

ZORA
Whoever she is. I always know when
there's a "her." The last one ran
away too.

The cops glance at each other.

ZORA (CONT'D)
You sure you didn't speak to him at
the party?

ANNA

There were so many people I don't believe I did. What's going on?

LIEUTENANT

Julius Stone. He's missing. I understand you're acquaintances?

ANNA

Missing? Wow... yeah. We were.

The Lieutenant closes his notebook.

LIEUTENANT

Call me if either of you hear a thing. We'll be in touch.

ZORA

Never let a man do this to you.

ANNA

I'm sure he'll... turn up.

Anna turns to go. Zora gets up.

ZORA

You been back to Virgie's? Hair looks amazing.

ANNA

Uh, no. I guess that pink stuff is a miracle.

ZORA

(pointed)

That all you using?

Does she know?

ANNA

What else would I be using?

ZORA

You sure you didn't see Julius?

A battle behind both their eyes.

ANNA

Okay... I didn't think this was important so I didn't want to say anything because... Look, I caught a glimpse of him. Just for a moment. Seemed like he was with this blonde from downstairs.

ZORA & LIEUTENANT
Who is she?

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - LATER

Christina sits before Anna, Zora and the Lieutenant.

CHRISTINA
Well, I was just telling him how
much I love black music and how I'd
love to work with you, Zora. That's
all we talked about.

ZORA
And he promised you a job?
In exchange for?

Christina's on a tight rope and she knows it.

CHRISTINA
Um, nothing. I'm sorry, he said --

ZORA
-- Julius says a lot of things. Did
you go home with him?

CHRISTINA
No. He... left me to look for you.

Anna spots it for the first time. The glow of hazel in Zora's
eyes. Recognition between them as Zora blinks it away. The
Cops jot down notes.

Another sharp pain in Anna's scalp. She breathes through.

EXT. COMPTON - EVENING

Anna in her parents' hood. Hurried.
She passes by the same row of salons. This time she goes in.
"Crowned" displayed in bright colors on the window.

Her hair, dry and brittle.

INT. CROWNED HAIR SALON - NIGHT

CORAL, a soulful woman with thick intricate braids done up
like a crown on her head, pulls out a litany of supplies.
Hair Food. Black Castor Oil. Scissors. Razor blades.

CORAL
Welcome honey.

Anna eyes the shop. A bit worn. A bit tacky.
Framed dead civil rights leaders hung everywhere.

ANNA
Thanks for taking me last minute.

CORAL
All good, had an opening like I
said. Gon' take a while to get all
this out. And then I could cut and
style you. Maybe four hours?

Anna nods. A BELL RINGS announcing the entrance of...

EDNA
Alright Coral please tell me Miss
Thing is on her way cause...
(seeing Anna)
Well.

ANNA
I didn't know you went here.

EDNA
Crowned is black Hollywood's secret
weapon. You'd know that if you
didn't have a thing about people
touching your hair. If that was
ever true.

CORAL
Aisha's on her way. Just stepped
out to make a call. Ya'll cool?

EDNA
Terrific.

Edna sits beside Anna avoiding eye contact.

ANNA
I'm sorry.

Coral pulls Anna's weave up from the root.
The pathways of tracks and braids show.
Like an android brain.

CORAL
Damn this is in here tight.

The pain pulses through Anna. Tears come.

CORAL (CONT'D)
Hey now don't you start with that.

ANNA
 Sorry. It hurts so bad.

This tugs at even Edna's heart. Anna's tears become a sob.

ANNA (CONT'D)
 I really fucked up. Just... get it
 off my head, please.

EDNA
 Jesus Anna. It's just hair. I know
 I talk a lot of shit, but
 truthfully? I can't fault you for
 doing whatever it takes to get
 where they try and keep us from
 getting. And fuck you, the hair
 looks good.

A smile makes its way through Anna's tear.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Probably why I'm so mad...

Laughter now.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Perfect world. A woman should wear
 her hair however she wants. I want
 you living for you.

Anna chews on this advice.

CORAL
 Well, if you want another weave I
 ain't the one, now, but I can get
 you together.

ANNA
 Tie it.

CORAL
 What darling?

ANNA
 Tie the hair up. Fabric and rubber
 bands. Before you take it out.
 Please. For my roots.

CORAL
 (eye roll)
 Ain't heard of that one...

Coral puts the hair in a bun and wraps it as commanded.

EDNA

Anna I'm proud of you. Just don't forget who mentored you first.

ANNA

Never.

Edna and Anna share a smile, as does Coral.
The power of the Beauty Shop.

Coral brings the scissors up to Anna's hair.
The hair wriggles but can't break free of the wrap.
Coral peels back the edge of the weave.
More wriggling.
The edge of the scissors makes contact.

CORAL

The hell --

RUBBER-BANDS go everywhere as the Anna's hair bursts through.
It floats as if defying gravity before it forms a fist and...

EDNA

Anna!

SMASHES Coral into the mirror. Blood oozes from the head wound as her eyes go dark. Edna JUMPS UP to run.

But the hair braids. Grabs her ankles. She hits the ground.

EDNA (CONT'D)

No!

It's AISHA rushing in.

AISHA

Sis, is my client here ye--

Aisha turns to see a fist of hair jut towards her. A SCREAM escapes her mouth before it's stuffed with Anna's hair.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. CROWNED HAIR SALON - NIGHT

Anna at the center of a spider web of hair, sucking and draining the life out of Coral, Edna and Aisha.

Her eyes flicker to brown. The hair detaches and curls back towards her head. Despair and dread.

ANNA
 Why? You didn't have to do that.
 You didn't have to kill them...

Anna looks up at her reflection in the cracked mirror.
 She's in the middle of a crime scene.

EXT. CROWNED HAIR SALON - NIGHT

Anna hurls herself into the street.
 Runs toward a payphone. She shoves money into it. Dials.

ANNA
 Come on! Come ON!

ZORA (ON PHONE)
 Sorry I can't come to the phone
 right now, please leave --

Anna hangs up. More coins. More ringing. As she waits Anna
 spots a group of women approach Crowned. They SCREAM at what
 they see. Women from nearby salons rush out.

ZORA (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
 Sorry I can't come to the--

Anna sinks in despair. Until she hears:

ZORA (CONT'D)
 -- probably still at the office.
 Catch you when I can.

EXT. MVT - NIGHT

Anna hops out the bus. One lone light on Cult's floor.

INT. CULT OFFICES - NIGHT

Anna rushes out the elevators. The light on is Zora's.

ANNA
 Zora!?

Anna walks toward it...

ANNA (CONT'D)
 Zora? Zora? I need --

But what she sees sinks her heart.

Christina's bloodless corpse. Limp on the ground.
Weeping draws Anna into...

INT. ZORA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Anna steps in. Zora looks with bloodshot, tear filled eyes.

ZORA
I didn't mean to!

Anna backs out of the room.

INT. CULTURE OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Zora gives chase as Anna backs away.

ZORA
Anna! Stop! Please!

Anna stops. Tears in her eyes.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Something bad's happening...

ANNA
I'm aware...

ZORA
Is it happening to you too?

ANNA
I don't know what you're --

ZORA
I pretended I didn't... notice. But
at some point even the butcher
selling you the stuff wonders what
you need four pounds of raw meat
for every night.

Anna swallows the lump in her throat.

ZORA (CONT'D)
What did you do? To feed it?

ANNA
Bad things. I can't afford that
much meat.

ZORA
One moment you're someone you
recognize. Then this...
(MORE)

ZORA (CONT'D)
rush of desire. It's like there's
somebody else trying to get in
here.

Zora taps her head. Anna's eyes betray she understands completely. Zora walks towards her. Anna steps back in fear.

Zora swipes a pair of scissors and jams them at her head. The edge stops a centimeter from her temple. Her own hair holds her hand back. Zora drops the scissors.

ZORA (CONT'D)
It protects itself you know. I've
tried everything. Even went back to
Virgie's. To say what I don't know.
Not that it matters. It's boarded
up. Did you know that? The bitch
left town!

ANNA
Zora... this is happening to other
people too?

ZORA
Let me just check in with my killer
weave support group and gather
everyone's sentiments. I don't
fucking know what's happening with
everyone else. Who have you talked
to about this?

Anna has no answer.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Who would you tell? It's absurd.

ANNA
Does it talk to you? Tell you
things? Show you things?

Tears in Zora's eyes. She's tormented. She angles the scissor's towards herself again. The hair starts to writhe.

ZORA
Not anymore.

She brings the blade not to the hair, but to her neck.

ANNA
No!

ZORA
You want blood. Bon appétit.

Zora scraps the blade across her neck. Draws blood. Before she can properly slit herself a braid grabs her hand.

Chucks the scissors across the room. Then, as if weightless the hair floats around Zora. Anna and Zora look in awe.

It's floats straight up. Then braids.
Then swiftly wraps itself around Zora's neck. Yanks her up.
And SNAP! Hangs her.

ANNA

Oh God!

As Zora's body drops to the ground.
Anna turns and runs. Falls to the ground.
Crawls. Runs again.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

And runs out into the street.
She runs.
And runs.
And RUNS.

EXT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Focus on a sign. "Open 24/7" Anna enters.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Anna and a WHITE LIBRARIAN stare at wall of books.

ANNA

This is your entire African
American section?

LIBRIAN

Actually just these rows. Oh wait.
Just this one. The other row is
Indian stuff.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Anna flips through "THE PEOPLE COULD FLY: AMERICAN BLACK FOLKTALES" furiously. Nothing. PAIN strikes her scalp.

Anna goes to return the books to the shelf. A book sticks out from the "Indian" section below: **"Tribal Magic: Secret lives of The Red Man before the White Man came."**

Anna pulls the book out the shelf. Flips through it. It has illustrations. One of a Native American Medicine Woman. Her hair the length of her body.

Anna sits with the book. Flips through it. There's a story called: **The People of The Moss**. Anna sobers. Coincidence?

"...the Nuuteyah's ancestors were said to live in the long mossy hair of the tribe's women. If one was to be scalped, woe to the tribe that adorns their heads with the hair of the moss people."

As Anna reads, horror fills her face. Illustrations show hair chocking, strangling and devouring enemy tribes.

She scans the footnotes: **"The Nuuteyah are said to have occupied an area in modern day Mississippi, though many believe them to be largely mythical."**

Anna's eyes grow heavy. But she can't stop reading.

FADE OUT

INT. PLANTATION - NIGHT

Lightning strikes. Anna's Plantation Dream.
The same woman runs towards you.
Her hair flies upward revealing her naked body.
Not her face though.
Just as she reaches you screaming SALT POURS ON HER.

SPLICES of the Native American woman. Maggots devouring flesh. Anna screaming for help as a child.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Anna wakes up. Library books and notes everywhere.
Her hair stretches the length of the room toward her bed.
Anna yanks at it. Doesn't budge.

Ginger steps toward her ends which resolve in a knotted ball in the corner of the room. The hell?

Anna kneels and pulls at the hair ball. What is this?
Another yank reveals the sight of her now lifeless cat, Edgar, devoured.

INT. LIBRARY - MORNING

Anna's eyes pop open. She's barely moved

INT. ANNA'S BATHROOM - LATER

Anna gasps as she opens the door. Edgar's SNARLING.

All the various strands of hair around the bathroom.
They've joined in the middle of the room.

Phone rings. Anna just closes the bathroom door.

MACHINE

...do your thing!

ROSALYN (O.S.)

Anna! This is Rosalyn. It's almost
noon. Where are you?

EXT. MVT TOWER - DAY

Anna steps towards the tower.
The clap of THUNDER sends her feet shuffling.

Instinctively, she shields her hair with a newspaper.
A light drizzle starts.

INT. MVT LOBBY - DAY

Anna scurries in. Sadness in her heart. A framed picture of
Edna Knight still on the wall next to the elevators.

Her hand flies to her mouth. A sob wants to come.
Behind her, Brook Lynne. She sports a brand new weave colored
red, covered by a plastic bag.

BROOK LYNNE

Not today Satan! Not today!

Anna turns back towards the double doors. It's pouring.

FLASHBACK POP: Sandra's matted hair weave being RIPPED OUT.

SANDRA

When she says don't get it wet.
Believe her.

BACK TO:

INT. MVT LOBBY - DAY

Anna walks towards the double doors. This is the answer.
The sound of rain grows stronger. Almost there.

ROSALYN

Anna!

She turns.

ROSALYN (CONT'D)

Thank God! No one's been able to reach Zora. Have you heard from her?

ANNA

No.

ROSALYN

We go on in a few hours!

Guilt wells up in Anna, but before she can speak --

ROSALYN (CONT'D)

Anna, we need a host.

Anna looks back out at the RAIN. The sound of freedom...

INT. CULT LIVE SET - DAY

It's quickly replaced by the sound of a BUZZING AUDIENCE. The set's alive. Lit and swarming with PA's.

INT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Anna stares at the crowd while a WEAVED WOMAN futzes with her outfit. Another with her nails. Her hair is perfect. Rosalyn walks in.

ANNA

Still no word?

ROSALYN

No. She can be... spontaneous sometimes. I pray that's all this is. Even though...

Guilt in Anna's eyes as Rosalyn trails off.

ROSALYN (CONT'D)

Look. I choose to think some things happen for a reason. And Anna I don't know if anyone else could see it, but the moment I laid eyes on you, I knew this was your destiny.

ANNA

Really?

ROSALYN

Go out there and kill it.

Anna smiles as a P.A. starts a countdown.

APPLAUSE! LIGHTS! MUSIC! Anna takes a deep breath.

INT. CULT LIVE SET - DAY

Anna's megawatt smile switches on as she takes her mark.
The audience is on its feet. It feeds her. Cue cards go up.

ANNA

What is up America? I am Anna
Bludso, your host for today. Now if
you've been watching the promos, I
know you were expecting someone a
little taller, a little more
modelesque, but PSYCHE you got me.

Chuckles. She goes off script.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Zora is...well chile we don't know.
I'm for real, we don't know.
Supermodels! Right? But hey I can
kick it with ya'll, right? Right?

Applause. Laughter. They lap up her charisma.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Aiiight cool, cool. Well let's get
into it. Welcome to CULT Live. All
you at home have been voting for
your favorite videos all day, and
I'm about to unveil them for you
along with a lot of fun
surprises...right after the break!

More applause.

Hair and make-up people on Anna like flies.
Her smile fades. She stares at herself in a monitor.
Long hair. Living her dream. Guilt all over her face.
The sound of her HEART BEAT takes into...

MONTAGE

- Anna faking her way through the countdown.
- Brook Lynne and Anna bantering.

- Afriqué on screen gets down with folks lined up outside.
- More of Anna faking enthusiasm.
- More guests going wild.

END OF MONTAGE.

ANNA

Okay, and we are down to our top two. And what haven't we seen yet?

BROOK LYNNE

Haven't seen "Bad Things" by The Fellas.

Cheers.

AFRIQUÉ

Yeah, but what about "One Night" by Sandra?

More cheers.

ANNA

Okay. Our number two video is...

A video by The Fellas plays on a big screen behind them.

ANNA (CONT'D)

..."Bad Things!" by The Fellas!
Which means our number one video...

BROOK LYNNE

Wait, hold up girl. Now everyone at Cult knows that Anna is the biggest Sandra fan of all time, okay. So we thought we thought we'd do something special...

Out comes Sandra. The audience explodes. Anna's in shock.

Sandra grabs Anna into a hug to the applause. This is a kinder, friendlier Sandra than Anna met before.

SANDRA

Alright sis do you mind?

Anna couldn't speak if she wanted to...

SANDRA (CONT'D)

The number one video is...

Cutting through the space between the crowd is...

SANDRA (CONT'D)
One Night! By me!!

Zora. Her eyes hazel. Her hair impeccable. The audience applauds as the feed cuts to video. Anna's blood runs cold.

Sandra like a robot powering down drops her smile and leaves as they cut to commercial. No goodbyes. Anna looks back up. Zora's gone.

EXT. MVT LOT - NIGHT

The lot is dark. Cut by pools of yellow from work lights. Anna waves goodbye to her team as she leaves the stage. Her outfit replaced by workout clothes. Her heels with flats.

She stares up at the 13th floor. There's one light on. Zora's. Anna squints but... yes. It's her.

Zora stares at Anna from her office with a flight smile.

Anna DARTS inside.

INT. CULT OFFICES - NIGHT

Anna bursts from the elevators...
Walks toward the light coming from Zora's office...

ROSALYN
Wow wow wow wow wow! Girl!

Rosalyn steps out of Zora's office.

ROSALYN (CONT'D)
You were great!

ANNA
Zora. She turned up?

Rosalyn's expression dims.

ROSALYN
No... Anna, she's totally M.I.A..

ANNA
I saw her. Looking out that window!

Anna points. Rosalyn is unconvinced.

ROSALYN
I've been organizing her office for hours. She's not here Anna.

ANNA

I saw her!

ROSALYN

Anna there's something... weird happening around here. I'm with you on that. People have been going missing and... God I hope she's okay.

ANNA

Ros. It's Virgie. It's the hair.

ROSALYN

What do you mean?

ANNA

Everyone missing is connected to someone who's been to that shop. And now she's left town? Girl trust me. She's behind this somehow.

ROSALYN

You really think so?

(beat)

Well then we've got to find her.

Rosalyn's speech is cut short.
His face wrapped in tendrils of HAIR that YANK her into the shadows of the office. Anna SCREAMS as the door closes.

Silence in the room. Then it opens.
Anna stares with terror into the shadows.

Hair everywhere recedes. A ball of hair appears to grow taller in the center of the room. No... It's Zora. She's simply standing up. Her back to you.

No... That's her front. You see her hazel eyes first as her face emerges from her hair.

ANNA

Zora? That you girl?

Zora smiles.
Hair JUTS out from every orifice in her face.

Anna screams. More importantly... RUNS.

She rounds a corner and...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

... slips in. Careful to close the door QUIETLY.
She listens for Zora and notices something.
Her ankles. There's hair around her ankles.

Anna looks up. A spider web of hair.
Entangled like trapped flies are a few body parts.
The HEAD of a familiar P.A., bloodless.

Huddled in a corner are two of ZORA'S WEAVED EXEC POSSE and
BROOK LYNNE. They look up.

Anna's hair TREMBLES. It's hungry. Her eyes start to glow.
But she resists.

INT. CULTURE OFFICES - NIGHT

Anna leaves the room. No one's there. Thank God.

She takes a step and hair SPRINGS downward at her. Zora
perched on the ceiling like a spider.

Anna runs...

INT. CUBICLE ROW - NIGHT

Cubicles where the desks were. Anna runs to the emergency
exit. A glass door. Locked. Fuck.

A RUSTLE behind Anna. She ducks and crawls underneath a desk.

Rustling on the left. Then right. Is she close? Anna shakily
grabs a pair of scissors from the desk above and crouches.

The noise appears to die down. Has Zora moved on?

ANNA

NO!

Hair wrapped around her ankle PULLS ANNA out from under the
desk. She STABS THE HAIR with the scissors. A SCREAM and
drops of blood fly out from the hair.

The hair goes WILD and knocks over desks. Grabs a chair and
HURLS IT at Anna. SMASH!

A person sized hole in the glass emergency exit door.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Anna climbs over the chair and heads down the stairs.
She descends quietly. Feels something on her neck.
Like a web. Anna turns.
Before her is a thick nest of HAIR.
A gray lifeless corpse entangled before her.

Fuck this. Anna RUNS. Loud and clunky down the stairs.
The sound of a DOOR OPENING above, stops her cold.

She slinks into a corner.
Spots an ax behind glass. In case of emergency.
She waits as FOOTSTEPS announce the descent of someone.

They come CLOSER. Just as they reach Anna...SMASH
Anna busts through the glass and grabs the ax.
Turns to the figure, and...

BROOK LYNNE
NO! WAIT WAITIIIT!

Anna pauses. What the hell?

BROOK LYNNE (CONT'D)
Bitch, chill. I'm not one of them.

ANNA
You're not...

Anna moves her hands through Brook's hair.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Not yet anyway. But Brook. You
gotta get this out now. I don't
know how long ago you last saw
Virgie but...

BROOK LYNNE
...Virgie? What the hell I look
like, paying five hundred dollars
for hair and service when my girl
La'Neka can hook a sister up for
two fifty?

ANNA
What were you doing upstairs!?

BROOK LYNNE
I saw mutha fuckas coming up, I
thought, to celebrate. Next thing
you know I'm doing and saying
whatever I had to keep them Zombie
bitches at bay.
(MORE)

BROOK LYNNE (CONT'D)
I can't die right now. I ain't been
to church in like fifteen years.

BAM. BRAIDS of knotted hair smash through the door upstairs.
Ropes around Brook's waist and YANKS her upstairs.

ANNA
No!

Anna gives chase. Follows her up the stairs. Zora awaits.

The braid flings Brook behind Zora, whose hair goes wild.
So does Anna. Like they're both surrounded by static.

ANNA (CONT'D)
What's... no...

Anna's hair REACHES for Zora's. They join.
Anna can't pull away. But she doesn't have to.

Anna's still got the ax.
She smashes the ax in the air onto a tendril of hair.
Blood rushes out of Zora's follicles.
Zora SCREAMS. A primal, animal scream.

Anna swings the ax again.
This time RIGHT INTO ZORA'S FOREHEAD.
Zora falls to the ground.

Brook Lynne sits up.

Anna stares at Zora's body.
There is no blood.

BROOK LYNNE
Sis... let's go. There is no need
to check the body, trust me. I've
seen a lot of Jasons.

Hair worms out of Zora's head wound.
It pushes the ax OUT of her head.
Begins to patch her skin back together.

Fuck this. Brook is OUT. Anna follows.

INT. CULT OFFICES - NIGHT

DING. Brook and Anna arrive as the elevator doors open.
Afriqu  's inside.

BROOK LYNNE
Hey girl. Um... you looking to
feed, or grabbing a coat, or...

Afriqué's hair goes WILD as she SCREAMS.

ANNA & BROOK

Aw hell!

Anna and Brook run. Afriqué gives chase. Hair flying. It ropes around Brook. It HOLDS HER IN PLACE. Anna turns...

...as strand by strand hair worms its way into Brooks mouth. She screams until she can't. Goodnight Brook.

Tears in Anna's eyes want to mourn. Her feet want to move.

She runs... Sees a large control room before her.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Anna slams and locks the door behind her.
The walls are made of glass.
She crouches down below a row of controls.

Afriqué pounds on the glass windowed walls.
Weaved Execs from the conference room join.
Their hair grows. Pulses. PRESSES AGAINST THE GLASS.

Cracks in the glass.
It's just a matter of time now.

Anna tip toes over the bloodless corpse of an Editor.

ANNA

Damn...

She sits in his chair.

A deeper crack.
Matter of minutes now.

Anna glares at a "No Smoking" sign.
She chuckles and reaches in her purse.
Still has one. Anna lights up. Blows the smoke into the air.
They're almost in.

Anna spots spigots on the ceiling. In case of fire.

Anna jumps up on the table. Then the console.
Blows smoke directly into the spigots.

CRASH

The Women are in.
Like the Red Sea, the hair parts to reveal Zora.
Alive... or something like it. Suddenly.

WATER. Sprayin' all over the offices.

WAILING. As the Weave Women fall to the ground.
Their hair knotted up into balls.
Struggling to break free of their tangles.

Some Wicked Witch shit.

Anna's hair recoils too. Pulls her to the ground.
But she's different. She's not been fully taken over.
The other women ARE their hair.

CUBICLE ROW

Anna's hair pulls at her scalp. She's in agony.
Her eyes flash HAZEL as if the struggles in her head too.

She spots the pair of scissors. Cuts into her head.
It's a frenzy. Her hair fights her.
But it's weak. Tangled and frizzy from the water.
She cuts too deep. Blood. Screams.

Anna's weave, strand by strand, falls to the ground as she
chops and chops. What's left pulls her downward.

Anna persists. She slashes and cuts. Until enough is out for
her to move forward. Her head's a battlefield.

Anna stumbles towards the elevator.
She spots two hazel eyes. Trained on her.

Zora. Writhing in pain deep within. But not dead.
The elevator doors close and over their stare-off we...

SLOWLY FADE OUT.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Anna and Linda scan the bare apartment.
All boxed up, save for a dictionary:

Porcine

por·cine

/pôr,sin,pôr,sên/

of, affecting, or resembling a pig or pigs.

Albumin

al·bu·min

/al'byôomën/

a simple form of protein that is soluble in water and
coagulable by heat, such as that found in blood serum.

Anna eyes the ingredients on the pink lotion.
Porcine Albumin. Pigs Blood.

Linda clears her throat and holds a bottle of Anna's bleach cream. Anna tosses them out the window, into the dumpster.

ANNA
Let's go.

INT. ANNA'S APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Anna and Linda carry boxes towards the exit.
Gina passes by. New weave.

LINDA
Love your hair.

EXT. ANNA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Linda shoves a box into the back of her station wagon.

LINDA
Not too late to change your mind.

Anna slams the back of the car shut.

LINDA (CONT'D)
You ever going to talk about it?
What happened? It was your dream.

ANNA
There's cheap gas up the street.
Should probably fill up before we
head out.

INT. BLUDSO HOUSEHOLD - EVENING

Anna in her childhood room. Boxes everywhere.
Linda walks in with a suitcase.

LINDA
Last of it.

ANNA
Thanks.

And one more thing. Her uncle's book. Anna waits for her
sister to leave, grabs it and turns to the dog eared page:

**"De plain negress asked the Tree for hair like that and the
tree said yes. She came back looking so fine..."**

Anna keeps reading.

"The Negress explained she got it from the Moss Tree, where massa's pappy said he found a dozen of the Red Man's women hanging one day."

Anna's mouth drops.

"That's no moss said massa as the hair atop the Negress head came alive and kilt' massa's wife. Massa called for his boys to gather all the salt on the plantation and buried the Negress alive wit it."

LINDA

Anna?

Anna's not here right now. Here eyes rapidly scan the book.

"Dey say the moss still grow there. But if you see it, leave it lone. That's the hair of the Red Man what grows, not moss. Best leave dem be."

LINDA (CONT'D)

Hey Anna. I gotta go.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Forgot to tell you I got an appointment at Virgie's. Can you believe? I forgot I even made it, it's been such a long wait.

Anna's heart drops. She looks up.

ANNA

Virgie's is closed. Boarded up.

LINDA

You know I thought so too, but the girl on the phone said they're just doing renovations during the day and taking appointments at night.

ANNA

Linda. Don't do it. It... You want to know the truth? It was the worst decision I ever made. It ruined me.

LINDA

You looked great.

ANNA

But I wasn't Linda. Please...

LINDA

Look. I been thinking about this Kieren thing all wrong. We been together for... eight years. Truth is, you gotta keep things fresh. Keep 'em interested. They're men.

ANNA

Linda. It's not worth it.

LINDA

Anna. You're tripping. Okay.

Linda leaves. Edgar watches quietly from his cat carrier. His eyes flash... fuck. Hazel.

EXT. VIRGIES - NIGHT

Still boarded but with a more modern store front. "GRAND RE-OPENING MONDAY!" a sign exclaims.

Anna can't believe it. A glow peeks between the boards. A sound of a CREAKING DOOR draws Anna's attention.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Anna peers along the side of the building. Denise is taking out the trash. She walks back toward a side entrance.

She swings the door open wide and enters. Anna shuffles over. Catches the door just before it closes. She breathes. Waits.

INT. VIRGIE'S - NIGHT

Anna slowly peers inside. Denise is gone. This is a part of the salon Anna's never seen. A back room with boxes of hair on shelves. Manning Co. printed on each.

A television is on. No... several. Anna tip toes past the shelves. Out in the open is a wall of TVs.

Black faces on each one. Music videos featuring black women being degraded, poured honey on, treated like props. Hair commercials sell you whiteness. So do commercials for bleach cream. Old movies featuring Mammies in blackface also play. A white woman in blackface playing Topsy shucks and jives.

Before the wall of TV's are a half a dozen women. They hang from the ceiling by their hair. Sandra. Zora and Afriqué among them. Anna holds her breath. Zora watches footage of...

Zora. Sandra watches her old movies. Sandra repeats her TV self perfectly.

SANDRA

Haven't you ever had a dream?

Zora, or what is passing for her, struggles to speak at all. As if still learning her own language.

Anna steps gingerly past the opening in the shelves. The women don't seem to notice. Anna doesn't notice either...

As Rosalyn (!!) SLAMS a metal trash can into Anna's head.

CUT TO:

INT. VIRGIES - NIGHT

Anna wakes up. Strapped to a metal gurney.
Her scarred bald head on display.
Her wrists and ankles strapped down.
She struggles. Can't get out.

Virgie sits before her. A ratted bundle of hair. She tsks.
Behind her a two-way mirror reveals the Salon.

VIRGIE

You had to go and get it wet.

Virgie pets the piece of hair which trembles in her hands.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)

You fed her well though. And she
learned so much poking around in
that head of yours. But try as she
might, she couldn't have you.

Anna is speechless as Rosalyn prepares a tray with metal tools meant for weaving hair.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)

It was your fear that saved you. A
childhood memory she says she
couldn't get past. Kept locking her
out. It won't save you now.
The more you resist, the longer it
will take. The more it will hurt.

ANNA

Why us? Why target us with this...
Indian magic shit? Sister why us?

Virgie smiles. A bit charmed.

VIRGIE

Indian magic shit? What is it you think you know?

Virgie opens her mouth. Hair worms its way out and attaches to the ratted weave in her hands. Strengthens it. It fluffs into something more like when Anna first got it.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)

The White Man brought one thing to us of value. "Divide and Conquer." Do you know the strategy? You find the weakest among a tribe and give them something the strongest has. Knowledge. Weapons. Whatever is valuable. Threatened the strong battle the weak. Alliances form. And before you know it. Chaos. You promise them order, even as you slaughter them.

Rosalyn takes the weave from Virgie and places it beside Anna and the tray of tools.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)

We've been watching the White Man's stories. They don't think much of your kind. They've even got it so that your own men don't think much of you.

Virgie gets up. Threads her hook needle.

VIRGIE (CONT'D)

Your kind has the strength to rule this world. Probably why they've made you so weak. Perhaps the Great Spirit will give you another chance as well? Stranger things...

A bell grabs Virgie's attention. Denise has let Linda into the shop. Anna squirms as Virgie exits.

Rosalyn removes contacts from her eyes and washes her hands. Her eyes were hazel all along. She applies gloves as Anna looks in horror as Linda greets Virgie on the other side of the mirror.

ANNA

Ros. We didn't take anything from you. Our people are both victims!

ROSALYN

Our people?

ANNA

They brought us here! We should --

Anna stops cold. Rosalyn unbuttons her shirt. Just enough to see white skin. Below her collar line. Rosalyn rubs a finger on her neck which removes a layer of brown foundation.

ROSALYN

Don't tell Virgie okay sis?

Before Anna can scream Rosalyn BALL GAGS her.

Virgie re-enters. Anna watches as her sister waits.

Virgie lays the weave, writhing on Anna's head. Takes out her sharpened hook needle. Anna tries to scream. Rosalyn holds up the finger with the foundation to shush her. That is before she mouths: "Divide and Conquer."

Virgie doesn't see this. Her eyes are on needle. Which she plunges RIGHT INTO ANNA'S SCALP.

CUT TO BLACK

CHYRON: TWO YEARS LATER

INT. CULT LIVE STUDIOS - DAY

You pass by a monitor.

AFRIQUÉ (ON TV)

Authorities have no leads on the rash of missing persons from the music film and television industry...

A door opens. It's Amos and Maxine. Proud smiles. Rosalyn puts on a practiced welcome grin for them.

INT. AUDIENCE PIT - DAY

The set is even bigger than before. The 90's in full swing.

ROSALYN

You must be so proud. Two hundred episodes is a big deal in our business.

AMOS

This is really something. God I gave her so much grief. I hope she knows how proud I am.

ROSALYN

She knows.

Maxine smiles at Amos. Finally came around.

ROSALYN (CONT'D)

They're just finishing up with Rolling Stone.

LINDA

Mom. Dad.

Linda. A weave of Box Braids. She waves her parents over to some seats alongside the set.

Amos and Maxine make their way over and see... Anna. She adopts the black aesthetic of the times. Cross colors. Thick weave of box braids. Very Poetic Justice. A photographer grabs candid, while a reporter goes on.

REPORTER

People say the two of you hold the keys to success for new pop acts. Black or white, if its got a New Jack beat and it's not played on Cult --

ANNA

-- It's played out.

Afriqué, Sista and Brook join for a photo. All the hair.

AMOS

She really does look so...

Anna spots her Amos and Maxine. And Linda. Linda glares back at her with hazel eyes.

LINDA

...happy.

EXT. MVT TOWER - DAY

Above the MVT logo, a huge billboard gleams. Anna and Zora smile at you. "CULT! DRINK THE KOOL-AID!" A white truck passes by. A Manning Co truck.

MONTAGE FOLLOWING THE TRUCK

- The truck cuts through the countryside on a two-lane road.
- The truck pulls up to a shipping port by the Mississippi.
- You see the familiar Manning Plantation from Anna's dream.

EXT. MANNING CO. PLANTATION - DAY

A laborer crates up bundles of hair. The covers have different labels. Los Angeles. New York. Chicago. Atlanta.

You get a closer look. It was never moss.
It was hair covering these trees all along.
A laborer with hazel eyes chops more down.

He gets a pat on the back from a man. You know him.
Grant Madison. He's clearly the boss. Inspects the bundles.

GRANT

Nice work.

Grant peers at the tangle of hair and leaves and branches.
You move in. Deep near the tree's crown you see it.
A skull. Now two. Now... several.

Remnants of a worn leather Native American headband on one.
Hair slowly sprouting from them all.

FADE TO BLACK.